



Ministry of Wildlife & Forest Resources Conservation

UNFORGETTABLE WILDERNESS RECOLLECTIONS



01
Volume

**IT CONTAINS REFLECTIONS ON
UNFORGETTABLE MEMORIES
FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF
WILDLIFE OFFICERS AND DETAILED
REVIEWS OF ALL THE RESERVES**

**BELONGING TO THE
DEPARTMENT
OF WILDLIFE
CONSERVATION.**



ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This e-Book, called Unforgettable wilderness recollections, is dedicated for children and the general public of the Nation.



Volume 1– 10 of the Unforgettable Wilderness recollections series, which were published on the website of the Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation.

<https://www.mwfc.gov.lk/wild-life-stories/>

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Foreword

There are 3 Strict Nature Reserves under the management of the Department of Wildlife Conservation covering an area of 1,258,997.55 hectares. There are also 26 national zoological gardens in the country as well. Also, there are 09 reserves and 02 jungle corridors have been declared in the country. In addition, 01 Marine National Park and 01 marine reserve are there. Also 68 places are declared as sanctuaries or managed elephant reserves. All these forests are protected areas for animals and dedicated for their conservation. Most of those places are open to tourists to visit to see the beauty of the nature, thus contributing directly to the national income. These forests, rich in biodiversity, are valuable resources for research and education as well.

Protected by the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance No. (02) of 1937, there are about two thousand workers working there to protect these beautiful forests belonging to the Department of Wildlife Conservation. They have to ensure the safety of the animals living in the forest and the amount of work they have to do for in this regard is immeasurable. Among those tasks are minimizing the threat from wild animals to the people while ensuring the protection of wild animals, providing necessary treatment to wild animals in danger, providing them with water and other facilities during dry season, preventing wild animals from entering into villages, etc.

As stated in the 1937 Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance No. 02, which was only carried out by the wildlife officers, a few of the few tasks included driving back wild elephants when they enter villages, prohibiting wild animal hunting, preventing forest clearing, forest land encroachment, and protecting land boundaries, making appropriate re-introductions when the animal population decreases, as well as facilitating tourist visits.



When carrying out these unique jobs, wildlife officers occasionally encounter exciting unforeseen incidents. It might be exciting at a different moment. But those are lovely memories that I won't soon forget. Others will have the chance to experience their genuine lives by bringing back the memories of these officers, who occasionally give their lives to defend the forests and wildlife there. You can read about the diverse job experiences of wildlife department personnel to gain insight into their challenging working conditions. You can learn more about the topic by reading this collection of stories, which is also published on the website of the Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation.

This publication would not have been possible without the support of all wildlife officers who contributed to this by describing their real life experiences, Mrs. Rifna Rifai of the Ministry's Project Division, who has been working hard from the beginning to prepare each page properly and correctly in order to publish this series on the website in all three languages, publicity officer Mrs. Hasini Sarathchandra and the assistance of the officer Mrs. Mahesha Chaturani Perera of the Wildlife Department, who provide the details as required for the series. Their dedication and efforts should be appreciated. Also, we remember the late Mr. Rohitha Rajapaksa of the Wildlife Department who made the series beautiful by providing many photographs. Mr. Asoka Palihavadana, who translated this series into English , and Ms. Rifna Rifai, who translated it into Tamil, have contributed to provide you with interesting language translations by doing those tasks accurately and efficiently.



The work of Ms. N.I. Gayathri and Mr. Dimuthu Asanka Kollure of the Planning Division who contributed to publish the series on the website should also be greatly appreciated. Although there are many discussions to publish the series as a book, it is an expensive task. Ms. Ruchini Senaviratne of the Project Division gave the idea that the series could be published as an e-book. Ruchini, Rifna and Mrs. Thushara Wijeratne from the Project Division worked hard to create this e-book. The encouragement of Mrs. Chandra Herath, Secretary, Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation was received to publish this e-book.

This e-book is available in all the three languages, so those who want to read it in each language have the opportunity to read it in the language of their choice. One book has 10 chapters and its details are about 10 forest areas. This is Volume I and the first volume will be released this year, the second volume in the middle of next year and the third volume in the end of next year. By downloading the collection here, you will be able to easily get information about the forests managed by the Wildlife Department of Sri Lanka.

Dammika Malsinghe
Additional Secretary (Project)
Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation



MESSAGE FROM THE HON.MINISTER....



“The nation's lifeblood is its youth. In a similar vein, trees and wildlife are necessary for life to survive. The preservation of wildlife and forests for future generations is one of our fundamental duties. This series of "Unforgettable Wild Memories" is being published on the website of our ministry in order to accomplish that goal by increasing the children's knowledge of wildlife and forests and to inform readers about their role and inspire the wildlife officers. It does so by highlighting the nuanced, distinctive, fascinating, and perilous experiences of wildlife and forest resource conservation officers who put their lives in danger to protect these wildlife and forests. For convenient one-stop access, these works are released as online books (e-books) in multiple volumes in three languages. You will receive Volume I today.

I appreciate the efforts and dedication of the staff of our ministry as well as the staff of the Department of Wildlife Conservation who contribute to the publication of these series and works.

I hope that these works will help the future generations of the Sri Lankan Nation to conserve wildlife and forest resources.”

Hon. Minister Mahinda Amaraweera

Minister of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation



MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY



“I reflect on my experiences as a teacher and as a public official in my professional life. I met many people in many places. I enjoyed Sri Lanka's wildlife and forests. I am proud to think that an island with such beautiful and amazing nature has been created. It is also with pleasure that I reflect on the responsibility I have received as the Secretary of the Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation in a country with such a lovely heritage. We are carrying out that duty in a number of ways, and I would also like to extend my compliments to the "Unforgettable Wild Memories" book series, which will be released by capturing the memories of our officers.

My dear children, born, brought up and nurtured on this earth, if you want to fulfill your duty to your motherland, you should consider meritorious deeds by cultivating and preserving the plants and animals. For that, it is important to be nourished by the invaluable knowledge provided through such works.

I also deeply appreciate the dedication of the staff of our Ministry as well as the staff of the Department of Wildlife and Forest Conservation who are working hard to publish these series and this publication.

The conservation of wildlife and forest resources, which is our ministry's goal, will, in my opinion, be accomplished through such initiatives..”

R.M.C.M. Herath

Secretary,

Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation.



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01

WILPATTU NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - Chased by a marsh crocodile**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
Vehan Shanjith Weragama**
- **Description of the Wilpattu National Park**



Chased by a marsh crocodile

This incident occurred at the start of my career.

The Wilpattu National Park was divided into eight divisions. I had started as a Third Grade Ranger in one of those divisions, called 'Pomparippuwa'. In those days we were not assigned vehicles for field work by the Sri Lankan government. We were left with the choices of cycling or walking.

Anyways, an old paddy field was located at the pathway which rendered it virtually impossible for a vehicle to cross over it. In addition, this pathway also composed of a sandy area of about 20 square kilometers which caused any vehicle to sink into the earth.

Normally, when we conduct a raid, the suspects will have to be brought before the court. In those days, we could only obtain a vehicle from the main entrance at Wilpattu National Park to transfer any suspects before the court. Thereafter, we had to walk when called upon the day of the hearing to the court on foot.

A 46-kilometer distance separated the Pomparippu area, where I was assigned, to the entrance of the Wilpattu National Park. We walked this distance every morning the day we were to be present at court. We only carried a backpack with documents and other necessities. We would stop for a quick rest and refresh at the Thalawila bungalow, located 7 kilometers from Pomparippuwa, before embarking on the remaining 39-kilometre walk to the entrance at Wilpattu, whose area was known as 'Hunuwilagama'.



A “Kokariya Wila’ (water tank) was located along the path after passing the Thalawila bungalow. This tank consisted of brackish water. The road in this area was particularly sandy, which resulted in your legs sinking into the ground.

One such morning, I embarked on the journey to present myself at court. At around 6:00 am I found myself at the Kokariya Wila. The day had barely begun to break and all I had in my possession were a few ‘thunder flashes’ used to intimidate and chase away wild elephants. All around me, there was not a soul in sight.

I barely noticed the huge Marsh Crocodile basking nearby. When I passed, the enormous reptile, around fifteen meters in length, jumped awake and charged at me. I was fortunate enough to barely avoid its closing jaws. I forced my legs to run as fast as possible on the sinking path, I looked around to see this ferocious beast still chasing me which filled me with even more terror. With all the energy I could muster, I was able to put some distance between me and the fearsome predator. Looking back, I reckon this enormous crocodile chased me for more than eighteen meters.

Ever since, whenever I found myself on that path, I always kept an ever-wary eye for any crocodiles.





Mr. Vehan Sahanjith Weragama

Vehan Sanjith Weragama joined the Department of Wildlife Conservation on November 1981, as a 3rd Grade Ranger when he was less than 20 years of age. After passing his first and second efficiency barrier exams, today, he serves as an Assistant Secretary of the Anuradhapura Division. His loving family consists of his wife, daughter and son. They reside in at Galagedara in Kandy, whereas Mr. Weragama conducts his duties while staying in the Anuradhapura quarters.



WILPATTU NATIONAL PARK

Wildlife Reserve areas in Sri Lanka were declared under the *Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance* in 1938. The wildlife reserves are divided into several categories.

- 1) National Parks
- 2) Strict nature reserves
- 3) Nature Reserves
- 4) Sanctuaries

The first three sections include only government lands and are known as “National Reserves”. A sanctuary can include both government and private lands. Currently, about fourteen percent of the island’s total land area is declared as “wildlife reserves.” Of these protected areas, the National Parks are the closest to the public. This is because the public has been provided with the necessary facilities to see and enjoy the animals that live in them. There are twenty-six national parks in Sri Lanka. Wilpattu Park is also considered a “National Reserve” as it includes only government lands. The distance from Colombo to Wilpattu National Park is about 180 km.



Park entrance





Park Head Office

The “villu” is land that is too swampy to cultivate. This low-lying area is surrounded by an elevated area like a high wall and in the middle is flooded during the rainy season. “Pattu” is a set of villages, several sub- divisions or divisions. Accordingly, this area is called “Wilpattu” due to the presence of many villus.



Kala Villu

Wilpattu is divided into two sections for ease of management

- 1) Wilpattu National Park
- 11) Wilpattu North Sanctuary

The area of Wilpattu National Park is 131667.1 hectares. The extent of Wilpattu North Sanctuary is 624 hectares.



These lands are generally grasslands, jungles, sand dunes, lakes and tanks. During the months of January-February is a dry season while it experiences inter-monsoon rains from March to April. From May to early September there is a wet dry climate with a long dry season. Then it rains for the whole period from September to December. The average annual temperature is 27 Celsius while annual rainfall is 1000 mm.

There are about 40 Villus within the Wilpattu. These are mostly freshwater bodies. Some of these are saline, although not superficially associated with the sea. The wide sloping beaches around the villus are home to a wide variety of aquatic birds and mammals and are called valuable “feeding areas.” These are known as the main villus.

The swamps in the Wilpattu National Park can be defined as the flood plains separated from the periodically dry rivers. It has been identified that the limestone located in an area of approximately 24 km from the coast is different from the limestone found in the Jaffna Peninsula. The western strip of the lowlands is also composed of sea sand and is rich in sedimentary rocks. The sand and red clay rocks between Palagathurai and Kudiramalai are also rarely found in other parts of Sri Lanka. The central area is abundant with natural water holes and Villus.

The soil in the western hemisphere is very barren with reddish-yellow markings. It is low in organic and mineral substances. The soil in the eastern region is fertile and contains mineral deposits. They are reddish-brown in colour.



Point Kudiramalai



Geographically, it is located 30 km west of Anuradhapura on the North-West coast. It also extends across the border between the North Western Province and the North Central Province. It is bounded on the north by the Modaragam Aru, on the south by the Kala Oya, on the west by the Portuguese and Dutch bays, and by the open sea. The sanctuary, from the coast to the interior, located entirely within the Northern Province. It is adjacent to the park and is separated by the Modaragam Aru.

Wilpattu is also considered as a historical land of Sri Lankans. That is with the accidental landing of Prince Vijaya at the port of Thambipanni or Kudiramalai, a border of Wilpattu. Accordingly, not only the origin of the island's settlements but also the foundation of the state culture may have fallen in this area. Wilpattu in Anuradhapura, Puttalam and Mannar districts is rich in ancient ruins, legends and folklore.



Ruins of the Kuveni's Palace

According to legends, the ruins of the palace of Kuveni who wed to Prince Vijaya can be seen today in the "Kali Villu" area. According to a book authored by Ven. Ellawala Medhananda Thero, the palace where King Saliya, the son of King Dutugemunu, and his bride Ashokamala, who lived two thousand years ago, are said to have lived, the water pools, the ruins of the royal pavilions, etc., are also still exist at the Weerangoda and



Galbendi Thiraya areas in the northeastern part of Maradanmaduwa. Namely, the kingdom of Viladagoda, built around 161-131 BC, is also located in this area. This Kingdom is located at Aluthgama Junction, about 17 miles from Puttalam-Anuradhapura Road, at the border of the Wilpattu Sanctuary. This is a special place as there are many historical Buddhist relics here including the “Viladagoda” temple built by Prince Saliya. There are also stone pillars, caves of various sizes, cave drips and monolithic inscriptions in Brahmi script etc.

The Pomparippu area which belongs to the Wilpattu National Park is also an area with archaeological importance. The reasons primarily influenced for the selection of the area for excavations are:

1) It is located very close to the Indian mainland and therefore, to obtain reliable data on what happened during the cultural periods of the island due to the constant cultural and trade relations between the two areas from via the harbour and the north Indian coast.

11) Ecological similarity that have frequently caused the migration and establishment of settlement of the agricultural communities.

The area near the west coast of the northern part of the island is known as a prehistoric cemetery. This is a protected area located in the dry zone and can also be reached by a road from Puttalam to Ilavankulam. It is bound Kala Oya by south and the ancient Galge Vihara by the east. Most of the cemeteries in Pomiparippu are extensive. Excavations have also unearthed potteries with ashes. Through this research it was possible to get some idea of the technical knowledge of the people at that era. The ruins of an ancient



harbor used for shipping have also been found. Today, there is an ancient church that holds annual rituals. From the above information it can be seen that a lot of important historical records and monumental inscriptions and ancient fields, monuments and human cultural objects are hidden in the Wilpattu area. Therefore, Wilpattu National Park is one of the oldest and most important protected areas in Sri Lanka.

In terms of flora and fauna, due to the forests in the Western side, bushes, grasslands, and villus in the middle of the park and drainage systems in the center of the park, there is high biodiversity and ecological value here. It is home to 31 species of mammals, including *Rhodentia* sp. and *Chiroptera* sp., endangered mammals including elephants, bears, leopards and wild buffaloes. Among the herbivores, the elephant is the least densely populated, followed by the spotted deer. It is around 3,500 in numbers. Meanwhile, under the sanctuary management of the National Park, attempts have recently been made to make the elephant habitats suitable (enrich) for the animals by cultivating grasses etc. Also, populations of local and migratory birds can be seen here.



A Sleeping Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*)



Bear (*Melursns ursinus*)



Sambar (*Russia unicolor*)



Considering the vegetation in this area, there are 3 types of vegetation namely coastal grassland, lowland and coastal vegetation. About 73% of the park is forested or scrublands and the rest is open habitat. The coast is about 5 Km in extent and is a low-lying area while rain forests can be found in the middle with grown trees.

The major western endemic plant species in the park are *phoenix* sp., unchi, thelkaduru, kolon, wewarana, halmilla, satin, lolu, ebony, daluk, weera, palu, kon, mahadan, milla, kirkon etc.

Shrubs include Heerassa, Damaniya, Bu Kombe, Karapincha, Nelli, Ulkenda and Kukurumana.

Grasses and herbs can be identified as thora, mayura grass, heen grass etc.

The Wilpattu National Park, which has such an aesthetic and historical value, has suffered some damage due to terrorist activities in the past but improved roads built for military purposes, illegal logging and poaching. Expansion of settlements also threatened the integrity of the park and the invasive vegetation in the rehabilitated Maha Andaragollewa and Mahawewa reservoirs was detrimental to wildlife.

Moreover, Wilpattu National Park is managed by the park headquarters at Hunuwila village while eco-tourism activities are also successfully implemented.



02

KAHALLE PALLEKELE SANCTUARY



- **Experience - My encounter with an elephant**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
Vehan Sahanjith Weragama**
- **Description of the Kahalle Pallekele**



Sanctuary

My encounter with an elephant

As I recall, this incident occurred in February 1984. Our mission was to capture an elephant in the Galgamuwa, Ras Vehera region, then transport it to a different location after loading it into a truck. I was a recruit with nearly two years of experience. Prior to this mission, my work was involved in elephant chasing, so capturing and transporting an elephant was my first task of such nature.

The elephant had to be captured in the area of Kannoruwa tank. During that time, the area was not declared as a reserved forest. It was under the Mahaweli Project.

This elephant had garnered itself an infamous reputation. It was responsible for the deaths of 2-3 people and a significant amount of property damage in the area.

Including me, around 20 officials, some with experience such as Mr. Bahaman and Mr. Mansoor, were assigned to partake in this endeavor.

On the day of our mission, The elephant had returned to the forest after a rampage which resulted in considerable property damage in the village. We knew this elephant was undergoing Musth, which made it dangerously aggressive due to increased levels of reproductive hormones. Quietly and diligently, we followed its trail of footprints. After about half a kilometer into the 'Andara' (dense and thick) forest, we understood that this beast is approaching its herd. Suddenly, Mr. Mansoor signaled the presence of the elephant.



We heard a loud, angry trumpet and saw the elephant charging towards us from about 50-60 meters away. The elephant had picked up our scent because of the change in direction of the wind. We fired loud crackers to scare the beast away, but it kept continuing its warpath, drawing closer and closer to us every second.

Our group began to scatter and retreat. I was in the very front, fearing for my life with every passing second as this enraged, gigantic animal drew closer and closer, when as luck would have it, I noticed a large 'Palu' tree nearby. I ducked and covered beneath the tree. I had barely begun to regain my senses when I felt a powerful gust of wind almost knocking me over followed by a thick spray of mud. I had barely gotten out of its way when the elephant had jumped over me and landed with such force that its coating of mud rained over me.

After a while, when I could no longer hear the elephant, I heard the faint and panicked voices of my colleagues, anxiously reassuring each other and inquiring about injuries any of us have sustained. I noticed that part of the long-sleeved shirt I was wearing was caked in mud, with a partial imprint of an enormous elephant's footprint. The angry giant had missed me by mere inches. I survived.





Mr.Vehan Sahanjith Weragama

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Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary

Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary is spread over the Kalagam Palata, Pala gala and Kekirawa Divisional Secretariat Divisions in the Anuradhapura District of the North Central Province and the Galgamuwa and Polpithigama Divisional Secretariat Divisions of the Kurunegala District in the North Western Province. The boundary of the Matale District of the Central Province is located in the south east direction of this sanctuary.

The total land area is 216.9 square kilometers or 26690 hectares, which was declared on 1st July, 1980. Due to its location, settlements are located around the sanctuary and Hakwatuna Oya and Siyambalangamuwa Lake are also located in this vicinity. The road from Ibbangamuwa to Moragollagama *via* Polpithigama and the road from Galewela to Negama are the main access roads to the sanctuary. There are a number of by roads connecting Madatugama and Kekirawa *via* Kala Wewa are located in associate with this sanctuary.

The sanctuary was established in the vicinity of Hakwatuna Oya, Kala Wewa and Balalu Oya with the aim of providing habitat to wildlife including wild elephants that have lost their habitats due to agricultural activities, settlements and development activities in the area under the Mahaweli 'H' Zone.

Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary is rich in biodiversity in terms of its size. Public lands as well as private lands may be located in a sanctuary declared under the Fauna and Flora Ordinance. However, if any construction or development work is to be carried out on such private lands, the approval of the Director General of the Department of Wildlife should be obtained.



There are four main streams in the Kahale Pallekele Sanctuary. Moragolla Oya flows into Kala Wewa from the eastern slope of Kahalla. Hakwatuna Oya flows from the southern slope and Mee Oya flows from the western slope of Pallekele. The main source of water here is Siyambalangama Oya. In addition, many tanks such as Balalu Wewa, Bogahapattuwa Wewa, Adiyagala Wewa, Divul Wewa, Ulpath Wewa, Rambe-wa Wewa and Millagoda Wewa have been constructed for agricultural purposes.



Kala Wewa

The sanctuary is home to 256 species of plants, including high canopy primary forests, low canopy mountain ranges, middle tier forests, shrubbery, wetlands, paddy fields, and mountain ecosystems. A large number of species associated with these ecosystems are found here.

Many species of mammals, fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, butterflies, insects and mollusks are found here. Elephants, bears, black monkeys, leopards mouse deer, loris and pangolin are endangered species. Deer, sambur, wild buffalo, fox, toddy cat, mongoose, porcupine and giant squirrel are some of the other species that live here. The Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary is home to 150-200 elephants and about 10 tuskers. Abandoned chenas, tanks and teak plantations are the favorite habitats of the elephants.



During the day, elephants roam freely in the shade of trees in the bush. In the evening they come to the grasslands in the lakes and meet the water requirement from the lakes. The grasslands as well as the teak plantations provide them with excellent food.



Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*)

The sanctuary is home to a large herd of deer and several herds of sambur. They can be found in the lower layer forest as well as in the upper layer forest. Seven or eight leopards as well as several bears live here. About 427 species of birds are recorded in Sri Lanka, of which about 189 are migratory birds. There are about 236 species of migratory birds living in Sri Lanka, 34 of which are endemic to Sri Lanka. Many native as well as migratory birds can be identified in the Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary. Many of these bird species can be found in the primary forests. Chena lands, scrublands, wetlands and reservoirs are their habitats.



Orange Breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bicinctus*)



About 165 species of reptiles are recorded in Sri Lanka, of which about 75 are endemic. Many species of reptiles can be seen in the Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary and many endemic species are endangered. Among 45% of all species endemic to Sri Lanka are reptiles. Star tortoises, lizard species as well as water monitor, iguana, crocodile as well as gecko species can be seen here. There are also many species of snakes such as sand viper, python and cobra.

One hundred seven (107) species of fish are recorded in Sri Lanka. Of these, 20 species are recorded from the Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary and 4 of them are endemic species. Forty-seven (47) species of butterflies are found in the jungles of Kahalle Pallekele. Five (5) of them are endemic species and 3 species are endangered. Blue Moment, Common Banded Peacock, Blue Admiral are some of the endangered species. Common Indian Crow, Bush Grown are endemic species found here. Many of these butterfly species are also found in the scrubland in the sanctuary.

Kahalle Pallekele Sanctuary is a very important sanctuary located between the North Western and North Central Provinces. The sanctuary is home to a wide variety of species, including elephants, and consist of a number of wildlife-friendly ecosystems.



The main threat to the sanctuary is the use of the land for agriculture. Clearing of the forest by the settlers pose a threat to wildlife habitats as well as exacerbate the human-elephant conflict. Cattle are being sent to sanctuary, leaving elephants and other wildlife facing food shortages. Also, although poaching in the sanctuary is prohibited under the *Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance*, poaching is still practiced here at least occasionally. There are many medicinal plants in this sanctuary. Among them are Sandalwood, Aralu, Bulu, Mee, Olinda, Elabatu, Elanedun, Wadakaha, Rasakida, Kohomba, Aloe vera, Adathoda, KapuKinissa, Venivel, Watake and Walkaduru. Unauthorized activities such as sand mining, felling of trees for firewood, etc., cause damage to the natural resources of the sanctuary and their depletion. Attempts to use the sanctuary for various development activities and attempts to encroach on the sanctuary are another threat to the sanctuary.



Peacock Royal (*Tajuria cippus*)

Unlike National Parks, there are no provisions in the *Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance* for tourism in the sanctuaries. A sanctuary is a place where wildlife habitats are protected. Doing anything that could harm wildlife habitats in a sanctuary, destroying nests, destroying chicks and eggs, and killing animals is strictly prohibited.



03

KAUDULLA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - A Close Call**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
D.M.Weerasinghe**
- **Description of the Kaudulla National Park**



A Close Call

This incident occurred on a Poya day in the month of September 2004, at the 'KithulUthuwa' area, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Kaudalla National Park. At the time, my rank was that of 'Wildlife Ranger Class 1' of Polonnaruwa under Kaudalla National Park.

After midnight, around 12:45 am, I received word of an illegal timber transportation about to take place from 'AluthOya' to 'Madirigiriya,' passing through Kaudalla National Park. I was part of a posse of eight officials, two of which were Rangers; Mr. Rathnayaka and Mr. Pushpakumara, along with the driver of the cab, Mr. Thilakaratna, who went on the raid to catch the perpetrators in the act.

From our experience, those who engage in the unsanctioned cutting down and transportation of timber, are also not above poaching, being seasoned hunters with weapons and ammunition. After arriving at the destination and parking our vehicle a fair distance away from the road, I instructed my group to stay put and wait until called upon, while three of us went to 'Kotuathu' (man-made concealment spots in the ground built by accumulating fallen branches, dry leaves and various plants, for the purpose of hide in and hunting animals coming to the waterfront) to observe and report any suspicious activity. It is common practice to build a 'Kotuathu' in close proximity to a water source, in our case, it happened to be a stream.



With only the feeble streaks of moonlight emerging through the thick canopy to illuminate our surroundings, for we had turned off all flashlights for fear of alerting any no-do-wells, I along with the field assistant and the driver followed, cautiously made our way to inspect Kotuathu locations. I headed towards a great 'Kumbuk' tree growing beside a nearby Kotuathu. Perhaps it was my nerves, excited with the prospect of the upcoming ambush, that I barely had time to recognize the rank scent and register the presence of the massive bull elephant standing at an arms-length before me.

Had it not been for the remarkable, involuntary response provoked by survival instinct; kicking into gear at the moment of grave peril, and forcing me to dodge out of the angry behemoth's way at the nick of time, I would not be alive today to tell this tale. The gargantuan beast's roar of rage and our terrified screams aggregated into a deafening explosion of sound that ripped and echoed throughout the silent, peaceful forest.

Once the enraged colossus had retreated into the thicket and we had managed to gain some semblance of our bearings, I heard panicked voices shouting and yelling that did not emanate from any one of us. In our hesitation to gather our senses, we had become completely oblivious to our mission, the suspects were alerted to our presence of and were now shooting haphazardly in our general direction. We were able to duck for cover just in time to avoid getting hit a but in the aftermath of the sudden chaos, the rest of our team, who were ignorant of our exact position for we had failed signal them, also started firing in our direction. Ironically, we ended up dodging fire from both friend and foe.



It took us a while to distinguish the friendly fire from that of the hostiles, but by that time the gunfire from the suspects had started to slow down, until finally, it ceased. We made our way towards the enemy base to find eight bikes with wooden planks tied to each one. Our attackers had fled the scene on foot.

Even though we failed to catch the crooks, our spirits were lifted and soared with the understanding that there were no grave injuries or casualties among us, despite several close and frequent calls with death. Everything was well.





Mr. D. M. Weerasinghe

Mr. D. M. Weerasinghe, Polonnaruwa Wildlife Superintendent, 1st Grade, has joined the Department of Wildlife Conservation in 1998 as a Staff Officer. Mr. Weerasinghe has been serving as the Assistant Director (Legal) since 2013.

He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from the Open University of Sri Lanka and a Masters Degree in Forestry and Ecology from the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. In addition, he has a Diploma in Biodiversity from the University of Kelaniya, a course on wildlife management in India, and short-term wildlife courses in Thailand and the Philippines.

He is currently studying for a Higher Diploma in Criminology at the Sri Lanka Foundation Institute.

Mr. Weerasinghe's beloved family of wife, daughter and son lived with him in Battaramulla.



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Minneriya and Kaudulla National Parks are world famous for watching natural behavior of Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*). The grasslands around the Kaudulla Reservoir are a haven for elephants. Herds of elephants can be seen here throughout the year and during the dry season of August-September up to 200-300 elephants in herds at a time are abundant on the tank field.



Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)

National Parks are protected areas that provide complete protection to wildlife and allow wildlife lovers to view and study the wild animals and natural ecosystem. A total of 26 National Parks have been declared in Sri Lanka under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance promulgated in the year 1938.

Kaudulla National Park is located in Medirigiriya and Hingurakgoda Divisional Secretariat areas in Polonnaruwa District. It covers an area of 6900 hectares and was declared as a National Park on 1st April 2002.



This National Park is known as Kaudulla National Park as it has been declared in the vicinity of Kaudulla Reservoir. Kaudulla Reservoir was built in the 3rd century A.D. near the Minneriya tank during the reign of Great King Mahasen. This reservoir is important then and still now as a civilization and cultural heritage based on agriculture.



Annual rainfall in Kaudulla National Park is between 1500-2000 mm. The highest rainfall falls in the northeast monsoon from November to February. The dry season is from April to October. The temperature varies from 20-34.5 degrees Celsius.

Kaudulla National Park is located adjacent to Minneriya National Park and Somawathie National Park. The park features different eco systems like dry and wet mixed evergreen forests, grasslands, scrublands and mountain ranges.

In this National Park, Kaudulla Reservoir, Olamadu Reservoir, Veheragala Reservoir and Puliyankele Lake are located. In addition, the Minneriya-Kantale Yoda Ela and the Hatharas Kotuwa Oya and Aluth Oya also flow through it.



Likewise, there are many species of animals found in associate with this ecosystem. Elephants, elks, spotted deer herds, mouse deer and wild boars can be seen in the park's various grassland and wetland ecosystems. There are also tigers, bears, crocodiles, aquatic birds and various species of fish. The park is also home to a number of native as well as migratory birds. Aquatic bird species such as cormorant, Indian teal and herons can be seen here along the small reservoirs and canals.

Kaudulla National Park, which is known as a place for elephants to roam and to observe their behavior during the dry season, also elephants use this area as their migratory corridor at different times i.e. the corridor of the elephants from the Ritigala Strict Nature Reserve to the Somawathie National Park is fallen through this national park.



This precious National Park, which provides habitat for its fauna and flora and attracts the attention of local and foreign tourists, is under various threats today. Wildlife officials at the park are constantly engaged in combating illegal logging, poaching, wildfires, illegal land acquisition, releasing of cattle into the park, and sand mining.



04

YALA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - Terror at the Park**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
Dilip Dilantha Samaranayake**
- **Description of the Yala National Park**



TERROR AT THE PARK

This incident I am about to tell you occurred on the 15th of October 2007. I was eleven years into my career, having started out in 1996 as a Wildlife Guide, and now a Second-Grade Ranger stationed at the 'Palatupana' center at Yala National Park.

Every year, it is conventional practice to close Yala National Park to the public from the 1st of September to the 15th of October due to the drought season. Yet, officials are kept busy with the maintenance of ponds and roads, renovations and refurbishments of the several tourist bungalows situated in the park and conducting raids for poachers and other no-do-wells.

Since the park was to be reopened to the public the following day, we left Palatupana-center to restock the tourist bungalows. We set out on a 'Land Rover Defender', numbered 57-1462, as a small posse of five, consisting of Ranger Mr. Asanka Gunawardana, Wildlife Guard Mr. Mahendra Gamage, Finance Assistant Mr. B. M. J. Lakmal, Driver Mr. H. A. P. Chandana, and myself.

We stopped by the 'MahaSeelawa' tourist bungalow and the 'NawaButhawa' tourist bungalow and finally set out for the 'Thalgasmankada' tourist bungalow. At around 6:00 p.m., we were nearing our destination, having just passed by the tank known as 'Darshana Wewa' (also known as 'Kota Bedi Wewa'), when we got word of a probable ambush at the bungalow by insurgents of the 'LTTE' (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam).



As soon as we turned the vehicle around to flee, we were peppered with a barrage of gunfire, followed by indistinguishable shouting from both us and our attackers. As my eyes adjusted to the creeping darkness around the thick forest, I was able to determine the obscure outlines of about 10–12 militants. Fortunately, we were able to reach the center office despite the gunfire. We got out of the Rover to find 13 bullet holes in the vehicle, but every one of us was alive and had managed to escape without any serious bodily harm.

Our relief in escaping a sure death was soured as we received information of the militants having murdered eight soldiers. They had also burned down the keeper's house of the 'Thalmasgankada' bungalow, but both the keeper, Mr. K. L. Chandrasiri and assistant keeper, Mr. JagathThemiyapala, had managed to escape by hiding in the dense, dark forest.

We counted our blessings for surviving this traumatic episode, but this attack was one of several the LTTE had executed in the Yala National Park over the years, until the end of the nearly 30-yearlong, brutal civil war in May 2009.

As the war reached its long-awaited end, I transferred to the legal section of the Colombo head office at the beginning of 2009. To this day, I still count my blessings, for it is nothing short of a miracle that I survived.





Mr.Dilip Dilantha Samaranayake

Mr.Dilip Dilantha Samaranayake is currently working as the Park Warden of the Kumana National Park. He has worked in various National Parks in Sri Lanka. Yala, Udawalawe, Lunugamvehera, Wasgamuwa, Legal Division of the Head Office, Walawa Left Bank are some of the places where he has worked.

Mr.Dilip Samaranayake is a loving father of two sons, resides at Wellapitiya, Horana.



Yala National Park

Renowned as a wildlife paradise, Yala National Park is one of the oldest wildlife sanctuaries in Sri Lanka. Although this park with an extent of 126786 hectares is less in size than Wilpattu Park, it is a land rich in biodiversity. Located in the southeastern part of Sri Lanka, Yala National Park is bounded on the north by the Uva Range, on the east and south by the Indian Ocean, on the West by a tributary of the Menik River and on the Kataragama mountain Range. Yala Sanctuary became a National Park on 25th February 1938 under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance.

This national park is divided into five zones for administrative convenience.

Part I – 14101 Hectares – belongs to Hambantota District.

Part II – 9931 Hectares – belongs to Hambantota District.

Part III – 40775 Hectares – belongs to Monaragala District.

Part IV – 26418 Hectares – belongs to Monaragala District.

Part V – 6656 Hectares – belongs to Monaragala District.

In addition to these 5 sections, the Yala Strict Nature Reserve consists of 28905 hectares.



A scenery from Yala Buthawa Bungalow



The National Park which is located in two districts has diverse in annual rainfall and in the third, fourth and fifth zones belong to the Monaragala district receive rainfall of 550-775 mm whilst temperature there is 23 to 32 degrees Celsius. The first and second zones of the Hambantota district receive an annual rainfall of 400-500 mm.

The months from May to September are dry months, when the animals run out of water and food. During this time, wildlife is in dire need of rest, and during the peak of the drought, September to October period, the park is closed to visitors. The park is generally known for its wet monsoon and dry monsoon forests and thorn bushes. Ecosystems include freshwater and marine wetlands, mangroves, and marine ecosystems such as coral reefs. Located in the lowest plains of the island, some parts of the park are as high as 100 m to 125 m above sea level. The Menik Ganga and Kumbukkan Oya, the 11th and 12th longest streams in Sri Lanka, also flow through the Yala Park. Several tanks including Vilapala Wewa, Gonagala Wewa, Mandagala Wewa, Uraniya Wewa, Mahaseelawa Wewa, Heenwewa and Korawakka Wewa are found there.

41 species of mammals, 133 species of endemic birds and 27 species of migratory birds have been recorded in the Yala National Park. Wild elephants, wild buffaloes and spotted deer can be easily spotted here. Wildlife is mostly found in the marine areas of the first zone. Zones 1 and 11 of the park are a leopard paradise.

Bears, sambar, mouse deer, small Indian civet, foxes, wild cats, monkeys and palm civets are some of the other animals that can be seen in this park. Close to the ocean star tortoise, lizards such as the oriental garden lizards, common green forest lizards, and near rivers and streams, salt water and marsh crocodiles can be found.





Elephants (*Elephas maximus*)



Spotted Deer (*Axis axis ceylonensis*)



Bear (*Melursus ursinus*)

There is no shortage of water in this forest which has an environment conducive to the occasional nesting of migratory birds. There are about 20 lakes and lagoons available here for aquatic birds and other animals. From September to March of this year of the following year, the migratory birds lodge in the surrounding and nearby sanctuaries.

Some migratory bird species make a permanent home here, such as the Black-necked stork. Black-necked stork is the largest bird among the 'Top 7 Wild Sri Lanka' animals published in Sri Lanka.

During the migratory periods, the common sandpipers, Forest wagtails, Flamingoes, Black tailed godwits, Indian pittas, and the Golden plovers are found. Spot billed pelican, Ceylon Jungle fowl, Sri Lanka spur fowl, Lesser adjutant, Pheasant Tailed Jacana, Woolly necked stork, Painted stork and several species of herons, Bitterns and Egrets can also be seen here.





Black Necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*)



Blue Tailed Bee Eater (*Merops philippinus*)



Peacock (*Pavo cristatus*)

The second zone of the park has the least coverage of forest, but all other zones are covered with forests. The flora of Yala Park includes dry or semi-evergreen or thorny forests, wet deciduous forests, mangroves etc. Palu, Veera, Lunuwarana are the predominant plants and Ehela, Ranawara, Kohomba and Wood apple plants are also widespread. Other species include Andara, Kukuruman, Heen Karamba, Eraminia, Hirasa, Kirivel, Wild Pichcha and Asparagus. About 300 species of plants have been identified in the first zone of the park alone.



It has been established that there were settlements associated with this forest in the past. The Pothana, Palatupana, Helawa, Okanda areas are villages where people lived in the past. Over time, these settlements became forests and became paradise of wildlife. There is a statue of the lord Buddha in a rock cave at the top of the hill belonging to the MagulMahaVihara near Palatupana. There is also evidence that ancient Buddhist shrines were in a very advanced state at that time, according to ancient pottery ruins, Brahmi script, inscriptions, Buddha statues, etc. Inscriptions related to the reign of King DutuGemunu have been found near the SithulPawwa sacred ground. Pimburagala Kanda, Gona Gala, AkashaChaitya, ViharaGodella, SithulPawwaRajamahaVihara where the Arhat monks lived and the rock caves and MagulVihara are still places of worship within the park. There are many historical stories and legends associated with Yala. Meanwhile, the stories related to Andre are very interesting.



Yala entrance at Palatupana



Yala New Buthawa Bungalow



Divided for ease of administration, Yala Park has road facilities for tourists to visit. You have to enter Palatupana to watch the first part of Yala. This park is managed by the Park Headquarters located at Palatupana. 9.5 km from Tissamaharama town on the Colombo-Kataragama main road past Kirinda at the Palatupana main entrance is located . It is about 40 km from Kataragama to Katagamuwa, Sithulpawwa to Palatupana via Bambawa. Tourist lodges with all facilities have been constructed for tourists and accommodation should be reserved from the Department of Wildlife Conservation in Colombo. A tourist information center is also located at the entrance of the Yala National Park and a leopard Observation Center has recently been established in the park.



05

MINNERIYA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - An Experience of life and Death**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter - Dr.Vijitha Perera**
- **Description of the Minneriya National Park**



An experience of life and death

One day when I was at the Wilgamuwa office I received a message saying that an injured elephant was in the Minneriya area. I went to treat it with two assistants Gamunu and Jeewaka. The jungle around the Minneriya tank was an elephant habitat.

The Minneriya tank dam was destroyed a couple of hundred years ago but recently renovated. There are therefore thousands of mature trees submerged in the water, but as the level drops in the dry season, those dead trees gradually begin to emerge. They provide a wonderful opportunity for a perching and nesting site for thousands of birds that rely on a fishy diet. As the water level in the tank recedes, lush grasslands appear which are capable of feeding hundreds of elephants, These green pastures, stretching for thousands of acres with the exposed dead trees reaching skywards crowded with flocks of birds and the elephants grazing below, create a grand spectacle.

On the day that we visited the area we saw elephants by the hundreds feeding there. As we drove the vehicle all over the place searching for the injured one, we eventually spotted a huge elephant at the corner of the tank. From its behavior and the information received, we suspected it to be the one we were looking for. Getting closer to it, we observed it splashing mud on a wound on the right lateral side of its belly. It was such a huge wound it made us wonder how it could possibly have happened. The elephant was definitely suffering, as the wound had festered and the flies were attacking it. In addition, a gunshot injury could be seen on the left front leg above the knee. This too had festered, though it was not so serious. Another thing we noticed was that it was blind in one eye.



I decided to tranquilize and treat it. Driving a short distance away, we prepared our equipment. In the meantime, the elephant had come on to the dry area of the grassland, leaving the water's edge behind it. Although we had wanted to dart it and have it drop within the grassland, the elephant had walked out to the edge of the tank and we could not reach it in the vehicle. It was going to be a risky job for us to get to it on foot particularly as we had no skilled assistants. I planned to make use of its blind eye and use it to my advantage so, leaving the vehicle, we crept up to it on its blind side to prepare for darting.

Jeewaka followed me with a shotgun. Crawling forward, we slowly approached the elephant. About 50 yards away, I targeted correctly and the dart struck its mark. It became agitated and turned towards us but did not see us as we were stretched out on the ground. Sensing it was in danger it started running towards the jungle. We ran back to the vehicle and drove towards the elephant to block its way. Our attempts to stop it failed as it was running among other elephants entering the jungle, placing us in a very dangerous situation. It was a fairly thick patch of jungle with elephant tracks crisscrossing everywhere, making it extremely difficult to follow one particular set of footprints. Carrying our equipment, we started on a dangerous mission. To have only three people in the team is nowhere near sufficient for such an operation and, in addition, the other two were novices facing such a situation for the first time.



Safety was most important, as elephants were everywhere and we were following a potentially dangerous one that was agitated and knew it was being followed. Fortunately, after walking for about 100 metres into the jungle we were able to recognize the tracks of the sedated elephant. There appeared to be a dragging effect in the footprints, which was a positive sign that the tranquilizer had started working. Expecting to see the unconscious elephant, we carried on. Fortunately for us, it had fallen on the path without any hindrance to its normal breathing.

Straightaway we managed to clean some of the wounds and inject all necessary antibiotics and other supportive medicines. We could not properly clean the wound at the right lateral abdomen as the animal had fallen on that side. However, we knew that our medicine would help it to get rid of maggots and irritation while enhancing the healing process. I took a photo of my two assistants standing beside the unconscious elephant as it was their first experience of tranquilizing such an animal. After administering the recovery injection, we watched it from a safe distance but were worried because it was not getting up even though we poked it with a branch. After a while, it began to show signs of recovery so we moved further away for our own safety. However, it did not stand up but was resting on its chest. The posture of sternal recumbence is not recommended for elephants, as it can lead to respiratory complications which in turn could lead to suffocation. I wanted to make it stand upright.



Under such circumstances, the normal procedure is to light some crackers to frighten it into getting up but this was not possible as other elephants feeding in the grassland would rush into the jungle in chaos. It was now nearly 6 p.m. and was getting dark. Making a noise, foot by foot we approached our motionless elephant that had its eye focused on us but with no other reaction. We tried again to poke it with a branch to disturb it. Suddenly it stood up and turned around to chase us as we were running for our lives. We were going as fast as we possibly could with me behind my assistants. I felt that the trunk of the elephant was very close to me and that this was the last moment of my life. Actually it was the fear of death that made it possible for us to clear the jungle. My feet stumbled and I fell into the grassland, rolling over several times. For a few seconds I lay there dazed. It was sheer luck that we managed to clear the jungle, thus escaping the elephant, which was reluctant to come out into the open. A few more steps and it could have crushed me very easily. Somehow, we were safe.

Later I asked Jeewaka why he had not fired the gun for making a loud noise when the elephant was chasing us, and he said that he had tried to but it did not work. On inspecting it I found that the trigger had jammed. We had done the whole operation relying on a malfunctioning gun.

After about a week, we revisited Minneriya and spotted the elephant. The wounds were recovering well. Although it has given me a lifelong memory of the fear of death it was, nevertheless, a very satisfying incident.





Dr. Vijitha Perera

Vijitha Perera is a wildlife veterinarian and an Asian elephant specialist. He graduated from the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka and completed postgraduate study at the Royal Veterinary College, London. He has received special training at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Academy, UK and at the African Wildlife College, Tanzania. Vijitha is an award winning writer and he has published several books on wildlife. He has been working for 23 years for elephant conservation and currently he is the officer in charge of the Centre for orphan elephant calf rehabilitation (Elephant Transit Home) and he is also the head wildlife veterinarian for the southern region of Sri Lanka.



Minneriya National Park

In the past, Sri Lanka was a land that was self-sufficient in agriculture. From the middle of the Anuradhapura Kingdom to the Polonnaruwa Kingdom, the technology of building reservoirs in Sri Lanka was at its peak and many of the largest reservoirs in the country were built during this period.

That is why the Minneriya Reservoir in the Polonnaruwa District, built by King Mahasen, still holds a unique place. Minneriya Tank is a large tank located in Polonnaruwa and was built by King Mahasen in 286 A.D across the Minneriya River. The catchment area of this reservoir is spread over an area of 249 sq. Km and is a 13 m high dam with a length of 2 km. Renovated ancient Minneriya Lake is the center of the Minneriya National Park, supplying water to a significant area in the Polonnaruwa District, the nearest town to the Minneriya National Park.

It was declared a sanctuary in 1938 under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance (FFPO) for the long-term protection of its wildlife due to adverse human activities in the twentieth century. However, the deforestation did not stop and the area was declared a National Park on August 12, 1997 under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance in view of its long-term protection. Its eco-tourism activities began in 1998.



This National Park is spread over an area of 8,889.411 hectares in the Hingurakgoda Divisional Secretariat Division in the Polonnaruwa District of the North Central Province. It ranges from 60 m to 500 m above sea level and can be seen throughout the scrub, dense forest and Grassland Park. Annual rainfall in the Minneriya area is between 1500-2000 mm and the average temperature range is 20.6 to 34.5 degrees Celsius. During the rainy season The National Park receives Northeast monsoon rains from October to January, whilst the dry season lasts from April to October. The land is mainly reddish brown and silty soils.

The main water supply to the Minneriya Reservoir in the Minneriya National Park is the water from River Mahaweli flowing through the giant canal. The water flowing from Batu Oya, Erige Oya, Thalkote Oya, Kiri Oya and Madayampala Oya joins the catchment area of Minneriya Reservoir and only a small amount is added to the reservoir.

The floral community associated with this park belongs to the dry mixed evergreen forest. Vegetation and habitat can be found in low-canopy lowland vegetation, upland forests with moderate canopy, thorny forests, abandoned chena lands, grasslands and wetlands as well as tropical dry mixed evergreen forests. There are also teak and eucalyptus plantations cultivated by the Forest Department in Ambagaswewa and Kahativemulla.

When considering the herbaceous plants such as Palu , Satin, Milla, Kalumediriya , Halmilla , Weera,Katu Una , wal indi, Pohonare abundant and other grasses found in the dry zone forests as well as Kukuruman , kappettiya and Wara are found in abundant.



This diversity of flora and fauna in the National Park will provide food, shade and shelter for the animals that live there. Although the water level in the Minneriya Reservoir drops sharply with the onset of the dry season, the grasses and plants growing in the reservoir attract wildlife from the surrounding forest in search of food and water.

During the months of August-September with the increase of the severe drought season, it is a common sight to see elephant herds coming from various places such as Wasgamuwa, Maduru Oya and Somawathiya around the tank field in the evening.



Many locals and foreigners come here to witness this rare opportunity to see around 500 wild elephants at a time. Minneriya National Park is part of the Elephant Corridor that connects Kaudulla and Wasgamuwa Gardens.



About 24 species of mammals, 160 species of birds, 25 species of reptiles, 26 species of fish and 75 species of butterflies have been identified in the Minneriya Park. Wild elephants -Asian elephant, monkeys Purple faced langur, Toque Macaque, Sambar, spotted deer, leopard and Sloth bearas well as carnivores live here.



Local as well as migratory birds roam the Minneriya Reservoir and the surrounding wetland environment, including Little Cormorant, lagoon Gray heron, Painted stork, Great White Pelican and native birds like Sri Lankan jungle fowl, Sri Lanka Hanging parrot, brown-capped Babbler, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Crimson-Fronted Barbet, Black crested bulbul can also be seen. Among the reptile species that live in the park are Red lipped lizard, Skink, Mugger crocodile, Python, land monitor lizard and Asian water monitor are the most common. Many butterfly species can also be seen here.



Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)



The Minneriya Reservoir is the largest of the 16 large tanks built by King Mahasen. Although King Mahasen died, a shrine dedicated to him still stands on the Minneriya dam and the king revered as the God of Minneriya.



The Rambawila Tourist Home

On the way to Minneriya National Park, take the Polonnaruwa road from Colombo to Habarana you can reach the park headquarters at Ambagaswewa, 182Km away from Polonnaruwa. Tickets are issued by the park entrance office, 36 miles from Polonnaruwa. The Rambawila Tourist Home has been constructed for the convenience of tourists and reservations can be made at the Head Office of the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Colombo.



06

WASGAMUWA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - Face to face with Poachers**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
Dilip Dilantha Samaranayake**
- **Description of the Wasgamuwa National Park**



Face to face with poachers

This incident occurred on the 17th January 2017. At the time, I was the Warden of the Wasgamuwa National Park, with three years of service in the Wildlife Department under the belt.

During my time in the Wildlife Department, we received a plethora of information on illegal activities, including but not limited to unsanctioned tree-cutting, poaching, gem-mining, etc. On that fateful day, we got word of a group of poachers who had been sighted in the 'Sansthapitiya' area, which is located within the Wasgamuwa National Park. I, along with Ranger Chinthana Bandara, Wildlife Guard Chithralal Bandara, Field Assistants Saliya Bandara and Shantha Sriyananda deployed from the Main Office at around 3:30 pm to confront the no-do-wells.

By the time we arrived, at around 6:45 pm, the sunset had given way to creeping darkness in the thick forest. We set up our guard and not long after, noticed movement of what could only be that of the poachers. We were able to distinguish five individuals, armed with two guns and several torches, approaching our position in the abysmal light. As soon as they came close enough, we made our presence clear by springing into action and demanding they surrender.

So far, in all my experience participating in raids, it is often the case for suspects to surrender to authorities when confronted, intimidated enough to put up little to no fight at all. Perhaps, the experience of past raids occurring smoothly had made us lax, for we were not all ready for the suspects to stand their ground.



The sound of gunfire boomed through the air, an unnatural noise disturbing the peace of the quiet, dark forest. Once we were able to dodge out of the line of fire, we began returning fire towards the hostiles. This chaos continued on for a while, until I heard the unmistakable cry of anguish of someone who got hit with a bullet. Then the firing from the hostiles stopped, and we followed suit. After gaining our bearings, to our great relief, we saw that none of us had a gunshot wound. We walked over towards the direction of the offenders, and the torchlight showed us that one of them had suffered a shot to the side of the head, courtesy of a bullet fired out of a shotgun from our side. Miraculously, he was still breathing, for the bullet had not completely found its mark. By that time, every single one of the poachers knew that it was game-over. They were out-manned and outgunned, they surrendered for us to apprehend them. Soon after, we took the gunshot victim to the nearest hospital. At around 8:30 pm, the hospital announced that he had succumbed to his injuries.

The Department of Wildlife Conservation has filed a case against this incident and the case is still ongoing.

[Since the case is ongoing, exact descriptions on the shootout were not included in the story].





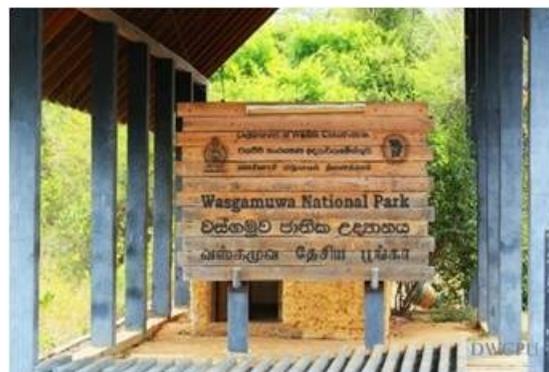
Mr.Dilip Dilantha Samaranyake

Mr.Dilip Dilantha Samaranyake is currently working as the Park Warden of the Kumana National Park. He has worked in various National Parks in Sri Lanka. Yala, Udawalawe, Lunugamvehera, Wasgamuwa, Legal Division of the Head Office, Walawa Left Bank are some of the places where he has worked. Mr.Dilip Samaranyake is a loving father of two sons, resides at Wellapitiya, Horana.



Wasgamuwa National Park

Wasgamuwa National Park (WNP) is located in the Polonnaruwa and Matale districts and is spread over the North Central and Central Provinces of Sri Lanka. It is home to nearly 300 species of wildlife and is bordered by the Mahaweli River on the East and the Kalu and Amban rivers on the West to the North. During the launch of the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Scheme in 1977, forests and wildlife habitats were severely lost. It is one of the four national parks declared under the Mahaweli Development Project in 1984 to provide protection to the displaced wildlife. Wasgamuwa National Park, Maduru Oya, Somawathiya and Minneriya National Parks are the other national parks that have been declared as such.



Wasgamuwa Main Entrance



Wasgamuwa National Park was declared on 7th August 1984 and covers an area of approximately 37,062.9 hectares. Wasgamuwa National Park is located at a distance of 225 km from Colombo and it is a place of ecological and biodiversity value.

Ruins of canals such as the Kalinga Yoda Ela, Malagamuwa, Wilmitiya and Dastota, which are believed to have been built during the reign of King Parakramabahu I era of 1153-1186, can still be seen in the Wasgamuwa National Park which is enriched with water sources. Yudaganapitiya, the battlefield where King Dutugemunu and King Elara are believed to have encamped is also located in Wasgamuwa National Park and the Arahants who suspected that the battle would be an obstacle to the future of the Sasana, the mountain that was created to prevent it is called Rahathun Mavu Kanda. The park is considered to be a famous cultural site as 1800- year-old Buddha statue and a number of ancient stone pillars are located.

Climatic conditions akin to arid and intermediate zones are exist and it is mostly affected by the Northeast monsoon rains in October-February. Although the inter-monsoon rains occur in March-May, the best time to visit is June-September, when the rainfall is low. Annual rainfall ranges from 1,750 mm in the north to 2,250mm in the south. The average annual temperature is around 27 degrees Celsius and there are slight variations throughout the year. During the Southwest monsoon season (May-August) the wind speed is high and dry and during the north-east monsoon it is low and humid.



The park is located in three drainage basins of the Mahaweli River i.e., Amban River and Kalu River and is fed by streams such as Karapana Ela, Kirule Ela, Veddige Ela, PalugahaEla, MidiraneEla, NawagahaEla and WasgamuOya. The rivers in the park are fed by streams that flow from the spectacular White Mountain, which is usually about 470 m above sea level. Rivers and the upper water catchment areas of the park have reddish brown soil as well as silty soil. The area is also rich in mineral resources such as condolite, thiruvana and marble. The high biodiversity of the National Park is also due to the increase in soil fertility and (topographical?) diversity due to the four rivers that flow through the park.

Wasgamuwa Forests represent the dry evergreen forests of Sri Lanka and showcase the highest biodiversity in Sri Lanka, including primary forests, secondary forests, riverine forests, and grasslands, thorny and rocky areas. More than 150 plant species have been reported from the park. Aquatic herb *Cryptocoryne walkeri* and Medicinal Herb Bin Kohomba are two rare species of plants of economic value. The forest consists of several layers and the upper layer plants are satin, Palu, Velan, Kaluwara, Milla, Weera and Halmilla plants and other layers of plants such as Divul, Red va and Katupila associated with the scrub forest.

Reservoirs and riverine forests support large species, with 23 species of mammals, 149 species of birds, 8 species of amphibians, 17 species of reptiles and fish which are the habitants of the Wasgamuwa Park.



Wasgamuwa National Park is the best place to observe Bears



About 17 species and about 50 species of butterflies live there. Of these, two are endemic, six are endangered, eight are endangered, nine are endangered, five are endangered and eight are endangered. A herd of 150 Sri Lankan wild elephants roaming in the Mahaweli River area in the National Park, also known as Lake Elephants.



Wild Elephants can easily see in the park

Animals such as the great monkey and parrot, fox, Gray Slender Loris, leopard, wild boar, grass-roaming wild buffalo and spotted deer are common in Wasgamuwa national park, while rare leopards and bears are rarely seen.



Spotted Deer (*Axis axis ceylonensis*)

Gray Slender Loris (*Loris lydekkerianus*)

Among the birds, 143 species of birds of Sri Lanka can be seen in the park and the Red faced Malkoha, Bahurumanaawa, golden forehead Kottoruwa, Sri Lankan Silu Mahakuda, Haban Kukula and Alukedeththa found in the park are of special interest.





Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)

Srilanka Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrocus gingalensis*)

Among the endemic and endangered species that live here are; the amphibian, the Ceylon wood frog, and several species of reptiles. These include reptiles, such as the Sripada forest skink lizard, thered lipped lizard and earles lizard, and among the snakes Ceylon fling snake and reptiles such as, Land monitor lizard Mugger crocodile and Asian water monitor can be seen while an endemic fish species, Ceylonlog suckeris also found in the reservoirs. Many butterflies can be seen flying around the park and 50 species of butterflies have been recorded.

There are three tourist lodges for residential facilities at Kadurupitiya, Vavul Abe and Mahaweli (by the river) in the parks and at the Fourth Junction, Mahaweli 1, Medapitiya 1/2, Vavul Ebe and the Seven Springs camps bookings are done from the office.



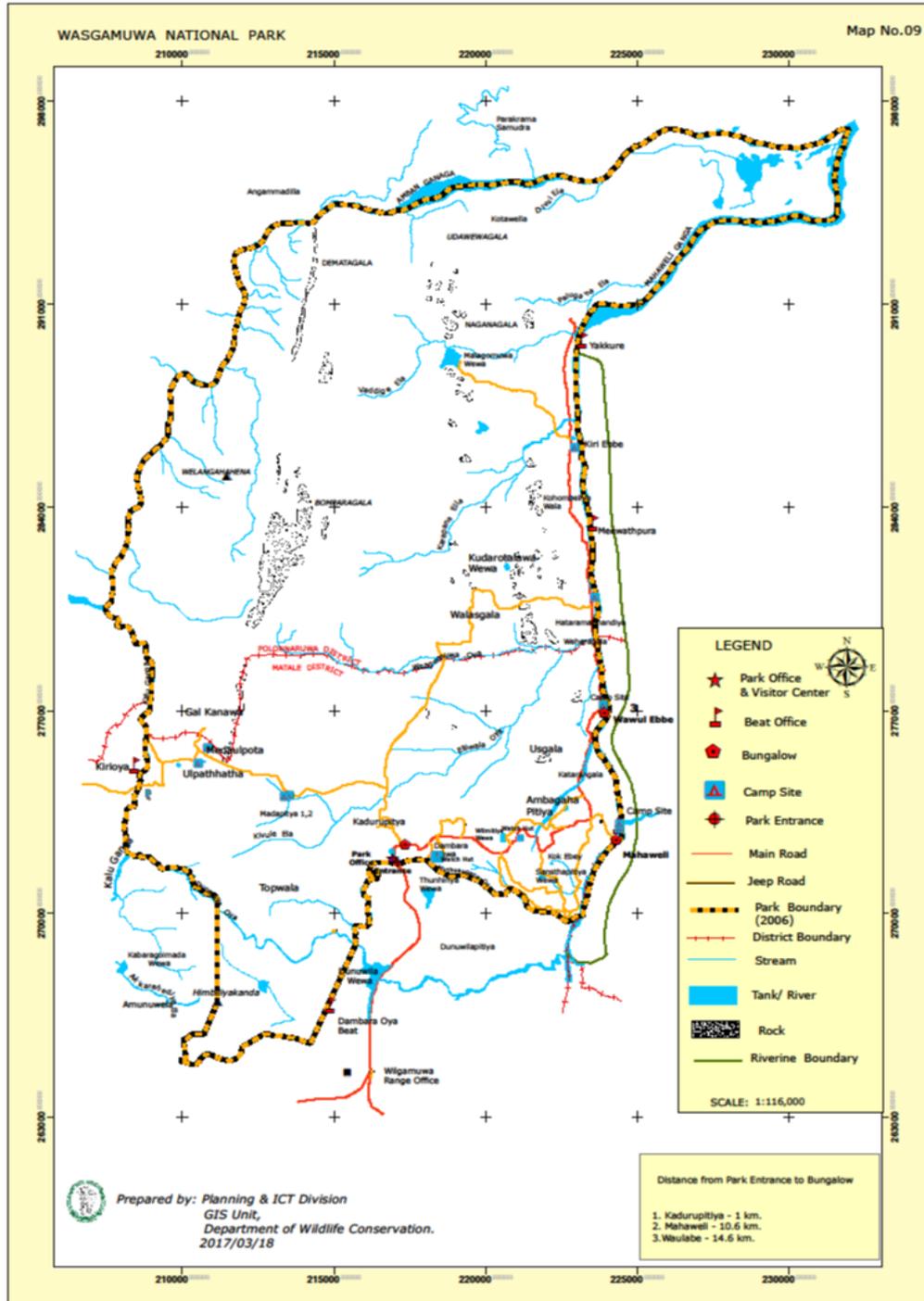
Mahweli Banglow



Vavul Abe Banglow



Map of the Wasgamuwa National Park



07

MADURU OYA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - The ‘Dead’ Elephant**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
Pubudu Suranga Rathnayake**
- **Description of the Maduru Oya National Park**



The ‘Dead’ Elephant

I was first appointed as a 2nd grade Ranger of the “*Maduru Oya National Park*” in 1998. At the time, the Warden of the Park was Mr. Ranjith Jayasinghe. He was a well experienced person and had undergone a training in South Africa. Excluding me, there were around five more rangers in the Park.

About three months into my service, one morning, I received a call at around 6 am. A ranger called Peter Singhor had arrived at the Head Office to report a dead elephant, lying near the main road. Thereafter, the Warden, Mr. Ranjith got ready to go see the dead elephant. I volunteered to accompany him. Mr. Ranjith, myself and Peter Singhor set out on the long walk to assess the situation. As we drew closer to the scene-of-death, the jungle around us grew thicker and thicker. Finally, we arrived at the spot, from where, not too far away, we saw the dead behemoth, lying beside a large, shady tree.

After a cursory observation, Mr. Ranjith proclaimed the elephant to be at about twenty-five years old, and dead for at least twenty-four hours. As we were observing its swollen belly, Peter stood beside the elephant’s trunk. Not soon after, we got distracted by Peter’s startled voice. Peter had barely yelled “*it’s not dead!*”, when the great beast stood up at once, as if nothing had happened at all.

All I remember from then on is running for cover, for a wild elephant is a formidable threat with a well-earned, fearsome reputation for wreaking devastating havoc. I waited for the wakened giant to leave, after which, when I was sure it was a safe distance away I ‘hooted’ to signal my location to the others. In our panic, we had run in



three different directions with absolutely no idea where each of us hid. Soon after, we managed to regroup. We were all shaken, but safe.

As it turns out, the elephant had thoroughly gorged itself – enough to gain a large, bloated belly – after sneaking into a paddy field in the nearby village of “*Kiniththagama*”, before settling down for a long, comfortable nap.

As a novice, nineteen-year-old Ranger, this was the first ‘high-stakes’ encounter under the belt during my time at the Park. I will carry this memory with me for as long as I live.





Mr. Pubudu Suranga Ratnayake

Pubudu Suranga Ratnayake is currently the park ranger of the Wilpattu National Park. He came to Maduruoya National Park on 09.11.1998 with his first appointment as a Second Grade Officer of Wildlife Conservation and has served in Wasgamuwa, Udawalawe, Kumana, Yala and Wilpattu National Parks and Victoria, Randenigala, Rantambe Headquarters.

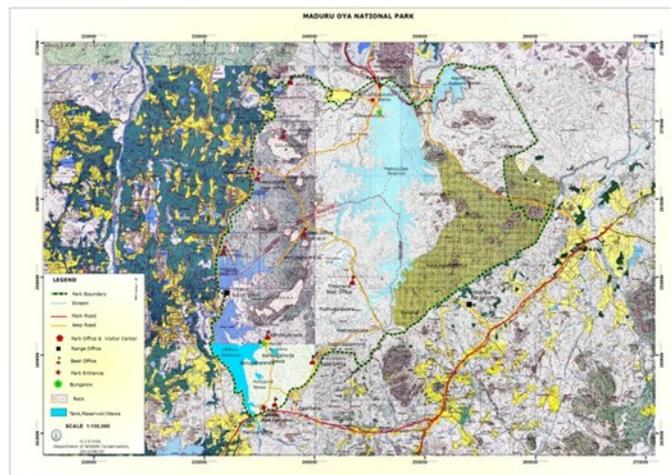
He passed the GCE Advanced Level (Science) Examination with a Distinction and passed a competitive examination and entered the Department of Wildlife Conservation. Currently, Mr. Suranga Ratnayake has undergone training in wildlife management in India and has also trained in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Suranga Ratnayake is currently the father of a beloved daughter and lives in Biyagama, Kaduwela.



Maduru Oya National Park

Maduru Oya National Park was declared as the 5th National Park in Sri Lanka on 09th November 1983, covering the catchment areas of 05 reservoirs developed under the Accelerated Mahaweli Development Project. The main objective of the Maduru Oya National Park is to provide habitat to the displaced animal communities and to protect the catchment areas of the water sources of Maduru Oya, NDK, Ulhitiya, Rathkida and Hennanigala Reservoirs. Maduru Oya National Park covers an area of 58,850 hectares. This forest trail belongs to the North Central, Eastern and Uva Provinces and is located in the Polonnaruwa, Ampara and Badulla districts. The entire forest area extends within the dry zone. The Park is located 288 km (179 miles) Northeast of Colombo. Maduru Oya National Park as a one of the national parks created under the Mahaweli Development Project, i.e., Wasgamuwa, Somawathiya, Jalagalum Nimmaya and Maduru Oya has many special features.



Map of the Maduru Oya National Park



If the purpose of the Maduru Oya National Park is further clarified, the purpose of this national park is to protect local natural resources and ensuring ecological processes, to ensure the quality of water in the park and the size of the reservoirs, to create eco-tourism opportunities and to benefit the local communities.

Maduru Oya is located far away from the course of the Mahaweli River. It is based on two reservoirs, the Ulhitiya and the Ratkida, where the twin sisters feed on the Mahaweli waters. The Mahaweli water flows through the Ulhitiya Oya and then to the Ulhitiya Reservoir and therefrom to Twin Reservoir of Ulhitiya, Ratkida Reservoir and then carry water to the Maduru Oya Reservoir through a 4-mile-long tunnel. The water holding capacity of the reservoir is about 467 million cubic meters.



A tunnel which carry water to the Maduru Oya



Suice Gate (Sorowwa)

Maduru Oya National Park is located in the Badulla District as well as in the Ampara and Polonnaruwa Districts of the Dry Zone. It is fed by the Northeastern monsoon in October-February and the Southeastern monsoon in March-May, the average rainfall is about 2000 mm and average temperature is 27 degrees Celsius. The main feature of this landscape is the 8 km (5.0 miles) rocky outcrops to the Southwest of the park. Red soil is predominant and does not spread evenly throughout the park and the organic matter content of the soil dries out very quickly. The hot water spring in the Kivlaella area is a famous tourist attraction.



Maduru Oya is made up of a complex of natural and human interactive ecosystems and it is imperative to allocate such a large area to small units or zones. Each of them varies according to its administration, management and usage. Permitted human activities may vary significantly from one region to another. For ease of administration, Maduru Oya is divided into the following management zones. They are,

- 1) Natural zone
- 2) Cultural Resource Zone
- 3) Development Zone
- 4) Jungle corridor or nature reserve
- 5) and the induction zone.

According to folklore and ancient chronicles, the area has been known as a forest reserve since ancient times. According to the Mahavamsa, Maduru Oya received attention from King Mahasen in 273 AD and King Vijayabahu I, who ruled from 1055 AD to 1110 AD. Formerly known as Mahadaragalla, this area was later renamed as Maduru Oya to suit the Hela language.

The ancient sluice on the side of the Maduru Oya Reservoir is a silent testament to the ancient irrigation technology. Indigenous communities in Sri Lanka are also live around the Maduru Oya National Park and there is coexistence between them and the National Park.





A scenery from Kirikoraha dance of the Indigenous community

The predominant ecosystem in the area is tropical dry mixed evergreen forests. Maduru Oya, far away from the Mahaweli, can be described as a forest of unparalleled beauty. There are a number of woody plants around the reservoir. Dry zone forests are dominated by Weera, Palu, satin, Velan. However, in the forest near river basins, Kumbuk, Thimbiri, Mee, whilekithul, na, etc. and Secondary Forest with shrubs as well as grasslands can also be seen closer to the Unukirigala where wet-dry features exist.

Maduru Oya National Park has a wide variety of animals in the dry zone, from the majestic elephant population to the tiny ant. The Unukirigala forest in Maduru Oya Park is a good habitat for the Red-faced Malkoha, which is known as a very rare bird endemic to Sri Lanka.



Red Faced Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus*)



Due to the constant movement of wild elephants between the two Banyon trees in the area and scratching of body of the elephants using a large number of hanging roots, they are lining up like teeth of a giant comb.



Hanging roots of Banyon trees like teeth of a giant comb.

Large mammal species, reptile species, amphibians, butterfly species and insect species are also found in the area. Endangered mammals, reptiles and fish species are abundant in the park. Endangered species including the Asian elephant, leopard, red-faced malkoha, Kabaragoya Asian water monitor, Mugercrocodile and the Python are found there. Also bird species such as Lesser adjutant , Woolly-necked stork , Bhaminy kite, Painted stork and Malabar and Hornbill , Mammal species such as Golden jackal , Water buffalo , Spotted deer and Wild boar , Porcupine Jungle cat and Reptle species such as Star tortoise , lizard species ,venomous snakes including cobra species also live here.





Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)



Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*)



Bhaminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*)



Gray Headed Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyatus*)

The easiest and most practical route from Colombo is *via* Kurunegala, Dambulla, Habarana, Polonnaruwa and Manampitiya. This national park can be reached via Polonnaruwa – Batticaloa road and Mahiyanganaya – Padiyathalawa road.

Maduru Oya National Park, a national park that is easily accessible to visitors to Ampara, Badulla and Polonnaruwa, this area is also witnessing increase in planned colonization. This has become a significant nuisance to wildlife in the park. There are two bungalows and one hostel in Edaru Atamulla in front of Maduru Oya Reservoir. For nature lovers, the Ulhitiya camp site is accessible and there is also a well-maintained wildlife museum at the entrance to the park.



08

BUNDALA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - Death at Bundala National Park**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter -
M.Rathnasiri Perera**
- **Description of the Bundala National Park**



Death at Bundala National Park

The incident I am about to tell you happened in 2004, just two years after my recruitment and second placement as Game Guard at Bundala National Park.

To get familiar with Bundala National Park, one must know that it is situated adjoining the Wilma Sanctuary and is smaller than its peers across the country. Despite its size, it functions as the perfect petri dish of a rich and diverse habitat, allowing the avid onlooker perfect opportunity to observe both fauna and flora thriving in its natural splendor. An example would be the annual visitation of migratory birds and the most welcome arrival of five species of sea turtle known to grace its bordering shoreline. It is realized soon enough by any wildlife enthusiast who visits Bundala, that those who work here possess an unparalleled familiarity of all animal and plant species in the Park's domain and a thorough understanding of the laws pertaining to their conservation.

Regrettably, the Park's luster is not without its downsides. Although poaching is a rare occurrence in Bundala, there are occasions where it has been known to happen, so although it was unexpected, it did not come as a complete surprise when we received information of an infamous poacher, known for being aggressive with officers, being in the area. We planned on a raid to apprehend the perpetrator and end his days of poaching once and for all.



So, on a fine humid night, we—Ranger ChamathLakshman, Wildlife Guards Nihal Rathnapala and Y.D. Karunaratne, Assistant Wildlife Guard M. Karunaratne and I started heading back after keeping watch for several hours beside the Bundala lagoon, when a gunshot pierced the tranquil silence and its echo reverberated throughout the forest. We followed the noise to its source and found ourselves near the bordering Wilma Sanctuary.

The low, familiar rumbling which follows the ignition of a tractor caught our attention in the pitch dark, heavily dense forest. We followed the noise and soon enough, were able to make out two beams of light emanating from what was an advancing tractor, steadily approaching our direction. I could only make out Assistant Wildlife Guard Karunaratne and was unable to identify the whereabouts of the rest of our small group, but I did see the light illuminate a well-built man, armed with a hunting rifle, making his way toward the driver.

With what precious little time we had left, we did not have the luxury of deciding on a proper strategy. I somehow managed to gesticulate to Karunaratne, that the two of us should circle around to the tractor's rear, thinking it would be easier to intimidate the poachers if we gave the impression that they were surrounded. Karunaratne and I were several steps along on our way when we were distracted by sudden shouting. The rest of our group – who had been hiding closer to the suspect, had jumped on the armed man, and were attempting to wrestle the hunting rifle away from him. Almost immediately, the ruckus was interrupted by the sound of another gunshot.



I made my way towards the commotion to see the poacher lay sprawled on the ground, blood gushing out of what appeared to be his ear. It was undoubtedly a grave injury. We fumbled around trying to stop the bleeding by applying pressure on the wound. Without wasting much time, we managed to load the incapacitated poacher and his now apprehended accomplice into our vehicle. As everyone seemed to be able to move without difficulty, we felt relieved with the realization that none of us had suffered any serious injuries.

I remember the rest of the group setting out to take the apprehended driver to the Wildlife office while Ranger Chamath Lakshman and I took the incapacitated suspect to the hospital, a few minutes after being admitted, the hospital notified us that the person had succumbed to his injuries.

After we gave our statements to the Hambantota Police, the Magistrate ordered a formal inquiry to be conducted at the place where the unfortunate incident took place. Through the inquiry, we came to know that the dead suspect was a member of a gang, which had drawn the ire of law enforcement multiple times. For about two days, we were the recipient of unsavory phone calls, no doubt a poor attempt to intimidate us to make up for the gang's loss and wounded pride. Nevertheless, nothing they said or could have said for that matter, could impede us in doing our duty.

On a happier note, this incident was the precursor to a much more amiable relationship between wildlife officials and law enforcement. Wildlife officers could be sure to receive any information which might require their attention much quicker than before with little bureaucracy. On an even happier note, since this incident, there have been no occurrences of poaching in Bundala National Park.





Mr. M.Rathnasiri Perera

Mr. M. Rathnasiri Perera is currently working as a Wildlife Ranger at the Haggala Beat Office. He joined service as a wildlife ranger in 2000 and was promoted to Site Assistant and later to Wildlife Ranger.

Rathnasiri Perera is an experienced wildlife officer who completed the Diploma in Wildlife Management at the University of Colombo in 2017 and was received the Sarath Kotagama Best Field Performance Award which is present to honour Prof. Sarath Kotagama. At present a successful program is being implemented by him to find solutions to save the leopard from the recent threats faced by the mountain leopard. Mr. Rathnasiri Perera leads a successful marriage with his wife and sons. His wife works at the Millaniya Pradeshiya Sabha and their only son is a third-year undergraduate in Physics at the University of Colombo. He lives in Horana.

He has also completed all the relevant management courses. He also won the Outstanding Wildlife Merit Award in the year 2001, presented by the Department of Wildlife.



Bundala National Park

The Bundala Wildlife Sanctuary which had been December 5, 1969 was declared as a National Park on 04th January 1993 with the primary objective of protecting the Bundala and its adjoining lagoon system, one of the last habitats of the Indo-Asian bird migration route. Located in the Southeastern arid region of Sri Lanka, the Koholankala, Malala, Embiligala and Bundala shallow lagoon wetlands are home to a wide variety of bird species and migratory birds. For this reason, the Bundala Wetlands were declared the first International Ramsar Wetlands in Sri Lanka, on October 15, 1990, under the Ramsar International Convention is especially important for migratory aquatic birds. Covering an area of 6216 hectares, although this National Park is a small National Park compared to other national parks it has many specialties.



Entrance of the Bundala National Park

The Pathiraja area in the park has been identified as an archeologically important site due to the discovery of fossil evidence of a prehistoric human. The unique gravel and soil layers found in the Pathiraja area have been confirmed to be between 74,000 and 64,000 years old. According to Carbon 14 dating, these gravel layers have been identified as belonging to a composition called Irana madu in the Tertiary Age. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of human habitation in the area during the Stone Age,



according to micro-tools found among the gravel layers. Furthermore, the discovery of semicircular and triangular stone tools in the sand dunes of the Bundala area has revealed many important facts about the history of human habitation of the island. Bundala National Park has been declared a Man and Biosphere Reserve by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



Sand dunes is in Pathiraja area

Bundala National Park is located in the Magampattu area of the Hambantota District. In the lowland arid zone, the annual rainfall is 107.4 mm and the average temperature is around 27°C. But April, May, and June are the hottest months of the year, with dry months from February to September.

About 1/3rd of the park is surrounded by submerged main lagoons. In addition, it consists of salt marshes, sand dunes, mangroves and grasslands. The main ecological zones in the park are shrub lands with thorny bushes and lagoons. In addition to these ecosystems, other ecosystems found here include tropical deciduous forests, predominantly with Ceylon green wood, sand dunes vegetation communities, coastal vegetation communities, coastal grasslands, riverine forests, shrub lands with mesquite trees, salty marshes, mangroves and seasonally flooded lakes and ponds. You can see riverine forests on both sides of the Kirindi Oya which falls into the sea from the Southern boundary of the park.



About 383 species of flowering plants have been recorded from these ecosystems. Of these, 06 species are endemic and 07 species are endangered. Endemic plants are Ceylon green wood (*Manilkara hexandra*), Malittan (*Salvadora persica*), Katupila (*Tephrosia purpurea*), Ranawara (*Cassia auriculata*), Hedge box wood (*Drypetes sepiaria*). Coastal plants include Maha Rawana Rewla (*Spinifex littoreus*), Muhudu Bim thamburu (*Ipomoea pescaprae*), and Vishnu kranthi (*Evolvulu salisinoides*). Kalapu Andara (*Prosopis juliflora*) and Cactus (*Opuntia dillenii*), which spread throughout the ecosystem as invasive plants, are threatening the survival of the flora and fauna of the park.

The Asian elephant plays an important role in the consideration of species. There are between 10-15 permanent resident elephants and 25-50 migratory elephant groups that visit the park from time to time throughout the year.



The Asian Elephant (*Elephas maximus*)

Other mammals include Spotted deer, Wild Boar, Golden jackal, Toque Macaque, Indian hare, Common Langur, Leopard and Porcupine. Reptiles species such as Mugger crocodile, Estuarine crocodile, Python and Cobra are prominent in the park.





Purple Faced Langur (*Trachypithecus vetulus*)



**Mugger Crocodile
(*Crocodylus palustris*)**

Five of the seven species of turtles a kind of reptiles living in the world have been recorded off the Bundala coast. A special turtle conservation project is also underway at the Bundala National Park to protect the eggs and juveniles of these sea turtle species; Green, Olive Ridley, Leather backed, Logger head and Hawks bill. The number of fish recorded in the Bundala National Park is 32 and there are 52 species of butterflies have also been recorded.

These lagoons and associated swamps are ideal feeding grounds and habitats for aquatic birds. Birds are native to the park, especially the Sri Lankan jungle fowl, Painted stork, Blue-faced malkoha and Spot-billed pelican.





Beauty of the Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)

Greater flamingo and Black tailed godwit are some of the migratory birds that visit the park. Once a paradise for the Greater flamingo, the area has been affected by a shortage of food due to freshwater intrusion into the lagoon caused by current human activities.



Other aquatic birds in the Bundala National Park

Lesser Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)



Yellow Wattled Lapwing (*Vanelius malabaricus*)



You may reach the park headquarters 256 km from Colombo via Galle, Tangalle on the Kataragama road, turn right at Weligatta junction and move 1.6 km from there. In addition, you can reach Bundala National Park within distance of 245 km on the Colombo-Ratnapura Road via Nonagama junction of Embilipitiya of Kataragama road.

Bundala National Park has a tourist center and a souvenir shop and a special bird watching pavilion built for bird watching. Bungalow facilities are not available but there are several campgrounds.



Visitor Center front & inside



09

UDAWALAWA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - An Unexpected Meeting**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter-
Mr.Anil Chandra Vithanage**
- **Description of the Udawalawa National Park**



An Unexpected Meeting

In my lengthy career in the Wildlife service spanning more than two decades, I have served across many divisions throughout the country, spanning regions in Thanamalwila, Handapanagala, Nuwara-Eliya, Adam's Peak, etc. I started as a Wildlife Guard in 1996, and later was promoted to the rank of Ranger. In 2016, I received a placement to Udawalawe National Park, which is one of Sri Lanka's distinguished National Parks and the closest one from Sri Lanka's prominent metropolis, Colombo.

Udawalawe National Park is renowned for its rich biodiversity. With large herds of roaming elephants, throngs of deer frolicking around and about, lively birds sporting vibrant plumage obvious everywhere you look, and even the lucky glimpse of a jungle cat going about its business – Udawalawe is an enticing destination for locals and tourists alike. Even for those intricately familiar with the park and all its residents, however, there remains a creature which bears the undisputed title for being the most elusive of them all – the Sri Lankan leopard.

Every New Year's Eve, I head home and return the following New Year's Day, but on December 31st, 2016, I decided to stay later than usual courtesy of an unfinished workload. When I was finally departing for home, it was during the closing hours – when all the visitors leave the premises. I heard the familiar rumble of a 4×4 engine behind me. I turned to see if I could hitch a ride to town, but it was already full. Suddenly, the cheerful faces of the crowd turned pale in sheer horror, and some started to frantically shout and gesture towards me. I turned around to check the reason for this sudden douse in spirit and froze.



A leopard, so close that its distinct, rank odor filled my nostrils. So close enough, I could reach it with my foot if I leaned just a hairs-length forward, not that I was in a state of mind to test this theory. So dreadfully close with its fierce eyes narrowed and its form crouched in position ready to attack the moment it sensed I was a threat. And there I stood, unblinking and unflinching, not because of some sudden dose of courage but because I was too terror-stricken to think or recall even the basic of human motor functions. It glared at me, daring me to move, to display even the slightest hint of hostility. Fortunately, I didn't. And then, in a blink, it turned and disappeared into the dense thicket of the forest. I exhaled for probably the longest time I've done so in my entire life. Relief flooded in with each fresh gulp of oxygen. Feeling returned to my numb, rooted legs so fast that an unwary observer would think I had been electrocuted due to the sudden wobbling and shaking. In blessed relief I turned around. And froze again.

A leopard! Yes, another one. A large, dangerous feline standing so close that I am sure I could count the spots pockmarking its face. The perfect mirrored facsimile of its predecessor braced and ready to pounce the moment it sensed danger. And all the blood pumping in my veins seemed to freeze in place, again. This time, I feared the beast would actually be able to hear my poor beating heart, working harder than it has ever had to, desperately trying to stimulate and revive – again – the motor function in my body which seemed to be more dead than a doorknob. I stood there, my gaze transfixed at the predator, oblivious to the world around me. And then, without a moment's hesitation, it turned and disappeared into the same path as done by its



brethren. Feeling returned to me so fast and in such force, it threatened to topple me over. As I stood, holding both shaky knees with my cold, numb hands and salivating every fresh gulp of air my lungs demanded, I noticed the return of chatter with sighs of relief. It was then that my thoughts returned to the crowd.

Maybe they had been scared to shout throughout the whole unexpected encounter, or maybe they did shout but I was too scared to notice, that I had blocked them out. Nevertheless, I thanked them for their timely warning, and we said our goodbyes. A few minutes later, I was able to gather my thoughts properly to logically assess the whole situation. Despite the Sri Lankan leopard's reputation of a ruthless predator, I remember that leopard attacks on humans were incredibly and extremely rare. Not that this fragment of information would have been any help to me during the whole ordeal, but for what it's worth, both the patrons and I had an interesting tale to tell. We had seen not one, but two leopards in the wild!





Mr. Anil Chandra Vithanage

Anil Chandra Vithanage was born in Avissawella. He received his primary education from Thalduwa Buddhist College, Kegalle and passed A/L at Eheliyagoda Central College. He has completed a course in Civil Engineering and is engaged in a related field. Due to his passion for a job in the Department of Wildlife, he joined the National Zoological Gardens Department and joined the Young Zoologists Association. It is through this that he gained his basic knowledge of animals. He also gained a broader knowledge of snakes. During this time, he also studied a librarian course.

Anil Vithanage was fortunate enough to join the Wildlife Department on 24.06.1996 as a Wildlife Ranger, fulfilling his desire. He had the opportunity to work at the Handapanagala site for the first time and has also served in difficult areas such as Thanamalwila and Nuwara Eliya.

Mr. Vithanage, who is more interested in exploration and research, has conducted research on dwarf elephants, white sambhur and endemic birds at the Siripada site and has also contributed to confirming the blue color of the blue Ceylon olive plant.



He was promoted from the Samanala site to the Rantambe Sanctuary. There he took measures to prevent spreading of a very invasive plant called *Polonia samantose* which is being followed by the Department of Wildlife to prevent it from spreading by the private sector. The case is not over yet. As a result, the plant was prevented from entering the Knuckles Reserve.

Mr. Vithanage's wife is a teacher and their family consists of a daughter and a son. Mr. Vithanage says that his children also love the forest and wildlife as he. They are currently residing in Maduluwa, Avissawella.



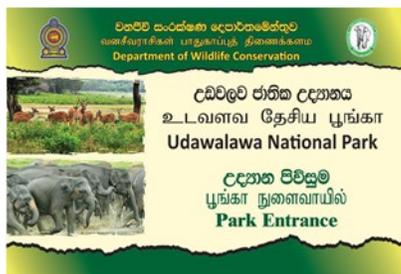
Udawalawe National Park

Udawalawe National Park, which bordering the Moneragala District of the Uva Province and the Ratnapura District of the Sabaragamuwa Province was declared on 30 June 1972 under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance for the protection of wildlife lost due to the Walawe River Development Scheme and for the protection of the watershed area of the Udawalawe Reservoir.



Map of the Udawalawe NP

Among the National Parks located in Sri Lanka, it is a National Park located closer to Colombo and has a total area of 30821 hectares. Isolated mountains can be observed in the predominantly plain area. The Kaltota Range located in the North and the Diyawinna Ella enhance the natural beauty of the Park.



Entrance of the Udawalawe NP



The land where Udawalawe National Park is located has a long history. The beautiful Kaltota area in the Walawa valley is famous as a village (Gamvaraya) gifted to *Neelamaha Yodhaya* (a leading person from King's army) by King Gajaba. There is also evidence that the *Neelamaha Yodhaya* engaged in agriculture in this area. Seenuggala, Muwanpelessa in the Udawalawe National Park were prosperous villages in the past. Ancient stone pillars and ruins found in the Veheramankada and Veheragolla areas confirm the existence of settlements in that area.

The Udawalawe Reservoir was built by blocking the Walawe River, one of the main rivers in Sri Lanka that flows through the park. Spread over an area of 1,155 sq km, the Walawe River originates in the Samanala area, joins many other streams and flows through the Udawalawe National Park, creating a unique ecosystem for its wildlife. In addition to the Udawalawe Reservoir, the National Park also provided habitat for wildlife displaced during the creation of the Chandrika Wewa, Samanala Wewa and the Mau Ara Reservoir which built under the Walawe River Development Project.

Situated in arid and sub-climatic zones, the park receives rainfall mainly from the Southeast monsoon. The annual rainfall is approximately 1524 mm and the average temperature is around 32 degrees Celsius. The western part of the park belongs to the intermediate zone, and receives relatively high rainfall. The border zone near Ratnapura shows the wet zone features while the border belonging to Moranagala District shows the dry zone features. There is a short dry season in February and March of the year, and sometimes this dry weather lasts from mid-May to late September, by September, inter-monsoons receive rainfall. The Northeast monsoon winds bring rain



from November to mid-January. In addition, convection rains are received from April to May. Wind speeds from May to July vary from 5.9 km / h to 6.3 km / h. The highest winds are seen in June.

Udawalawe National Park has primary and secondary forests as well as open grasslands, savanna grasslands, shrub forests and teak plantations. Prior to its declaration as a National Park, the area was subjected to clearing of forests. For this reason, many open lawns can be seen in the park today.

Among the existing plant species in the garden, tall plants such as satin, halmilla, ebony, kolan, milla, kone, kunumella etc. can be seen and Nelli and Bulu are found as medicinal plants. Kumbuk and Mandora are predominant plants on both sides of the Walawe River. Grasses such as Mana, Iluk, Pohon and Damaniya are also found in grasslands. Invasive plants such as Lantana and Kuratiya, which are unfavourable for wildlife, are a threat to the park.

The Udawalawe Reservoir and the Walawe River, which provide water to wildlife throughout the year and due to the abundance of food in the ecosystem, the Udawalawe National Park is home to approximately 250 Asian elephants and many other species.



Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*)



Large mammals found in the park including elk, spotted deer, wild boar, wild buffalo, and small mammals such as golden jackals, toddy cat, torque monkey, and rabbits. Cat family animals including leopards, rusty cat, fishing cat and bears are also found in the park. But the chances of seeing bears are very rare as there are a small number of bears there. Five species of rats, 30 species of snakes, 03 species of deer and about 50 species of butterflies are also found in the park. Among the reptile species are several species of lizards and the marsh crocodile, water monitor and iguana.

Among the species of birds found in the park are the endemic birds of Sri Lanka such as the spur fowl, the red-faced cuckoo, the gray horn bill, the jungle fowl, the Malabar pied hornbill, the Tambaseruwa, the golden breasted pigeon and the changeable hawk eagle. Aquatic birds such as seagulls are common in the Udawalawe and Maura reservoirs.



A view of birds



Changeable Hawk Eagle
(Nisaetus cirrhatus)

The distance from Colombo to the entrance of this national park is about 165 Km. The easiest way to reach the park from Colombo is to take the Thanamalwila road from Colombo via Ratnapura Pelmadulla to the left of the Thimbolketiya junction on the Pelmadulla – Embilipitiya road. The entrance to the park is located near the 7th km post on the Thanamalwila road.



Another tourist attraction of the Udawalawe National Park is “Elephant Transit Home”. The “Elephant Transit Home” was established in 1986 near the Udawalawe National Park as a place to take care of the baby elephants until they mature enough to live alone in the jungle, rather than bringing in baby elephants that escape from the herd or die in the wild. Playing baby elephants growing up in the “Elephant Transit Home” in front of the Udawalawe Reservoir will get attracted anyone who visits here.



Baby elephants in the Elephant Transit Home

Visitors to Udawalawe National Park can obtain tickets at the entrance office and there is an improved road network in the park for the convenience of visitors. Camps have been set up at Pransadara, Elephant Pass, Pilimaddara, Ranagala, Alikatupelessa and Hadagiriya for tourists who wish to spend the night in a campground and experience the wonders of the jungle. These campgrounds are located in a unique area that allows visitors to enjoy the maximum of wildlife and the unique experience of living in the jungle. Tourist lodges with all facilities have been constructed at Thimbiriyagasmanakada, Weheragolla, Seenuggala, Gonaviddagala and Pokunutenna areas.





Circuit bungalow at Gonawiddagala



Circuit bungalow at Thimbiriyagasmankada



A safari jeep



10

KUMANA NATIONAL PARK



- **Experience - Tales from the past**
- **Description of the officer of his encounter - Ranjith Sisira Kumara**
- **Description of the Kumana National Park**



Tales from the past

I was first appointed to the post of Ranger in the Department of Wildlife Conservation in 1981. First, I had to work at 'Wilpatthu National Park' and thereafter, on the 1st of February 1983, I assumed duties at 'Kumana National Park'. At the time, it was known as 'Yala Eastern National Park' or 'Hokanda National Park'. It was very demanding work, my home was in Galle and the bus, which came to 'Okanda Devalaya', ran only on Fridays. For the rest of the week, I walked 12 miles to 'Hokanda National Centre' from 'Panama'. This was my life for two years, till 1985.

To claim that 1985 was a tumultuous period in Sri Lanka would be an understatement. The country was still embroiled in a brutal civil war with the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam), and tensions were at an all-time high. After LTTE militants attacked Hokanda National Park on the 3rd of March, we were transferred to 'Yala National Park', where we would spend the following three years.

At the beginning of 1988, we came to know that local fishermen had squatted in Hokanda National Park and had set up illegal shanties beside the river. They have cleared the area of Mangroves and had taken to the lagoons to expand their fishing. Hokanda Park always held a special place in our hearts, and we felt quite hamstrung in our inability to intervene as our beloved park was being ravaged. Adding fuel to the fire of the political landscape of 80's Sri Lanka was the threat of a radical, violent civilian uprising in addition to the ongoing civil war. Some radicals even broke into an office belonging to the Yala National Park and looted any valuables they could find, and the collective morale of all who care for the beloved park suffered a stinging blow.



Over time, the deplorable situation deteriorated further and further, until the time came when the officers decided that we have had enough, and it was finally time to go on the offensive. So, we requested the Warden of Yala National Park, Mr. Edmond, permission to observe any suspicious activity and conduct a raid in Hokanda Park. Our request was granted.

We set out the next morning, at around 5.00 am from the 'Palatupana' head office on a tractor. Our team consisted of three Rangers, Manika, Gunadasa and I along with Assistant Ranger R.P. Karunasena. The other members were Sarath Indrapala, W. Rupasinghe, S.M. Anura Bandara, Nalaka Weerathunga, Somarathna Hettigoda, Premarathna Manamperi, Sepala Manamperi, and K.Karunasena. We crossed the 'Manik' river clearing any obstacles on the road, but when we were near 'Gajabawa' one of the front tires got punctured. We were left with no choice but to continue our mission on foot.

We walked a few miles, helping ourselves to the occasional fallen wood apple along the way. When we reached an area called 'Madamthota', we found it completely abandoned. The crudely constructed shacks were devoid of any inhabitants. After we had further travelled along the road for about three kilometers, we heard a noise, the distinctive sound of hammering iron. We followed the noise to find three people mining for gems, which is strictly illegal in this protected area. We arrested the miners and restrained them by tying their hands in the back, but now, we were left with no alternative but to take our new 'friends' along with us.



We walked eight more kilometers down the road adjoining the river till we reached the 'Galwangedi' area. We heard noises and followed the sound to find six men lunching in two shoddy huts. As before, we announced ourselves, restrained them and placed them under arrest. But now, our company was getting too big, and this is far more likely to attract unwanted attention. We decided to leave two of our own to keep an eye on the detained suspects and started off on our journey again. Not long after, we spotted several men on the road on bicycles carrying luggage. We did as we have done before, we announced ourselves and managed to arrest eleven men and confiscate materials in their person, despite a few being able to flee the scene.

And again, we set off to finish the task at hand. A while later, I noticed a man standing on the rocks in the middle of the river with a gun aimed at the direction of the treetops. He was in the middle of hunting Torque monkeys. None of us carried firearms in our person, the people who we were able to arrest were only intimidated by the authority that came along with being designated Rangers. If they had put up a fight and resisted arrest, well...things would very well have gone differently. To avoid getting shot, we realized it was of grave importance that we do not draw attention to ourselves by barging in and provoke the hunter into firing his weapon, and instead, opted to hide and wait for the unwitting hunter to come to us. We took our positions and hid until the unsuspecting hunter was surrounded. I went for his legs while the rest of the team were able to jump on and subdue him. After the hard part was over and done with, we added the restrained hunter to our new group of 'no-do-wells' and took off once more.



Along the way, a few kilometers out, we crossed into another clearing with a couple of huts, an oxen pulled cart, and four people. We adhered to the familiar protocol and added the new arrestees into our group of detainees and confiscated all belongings along with the cart and the oxen. Finally, around 3.00 pm, it was time to head back, and after we regrouped and made the long walk back to the tractor, the sun had already set, and twilight was giving way to the creeping night. We were momentarily startled by the sound of a helicopter passing overhead, but the rest of the journey back was largely uneventful and without hassle.

Looking back, I still breathe a sigh of relief to this day for our mission to have been completed without any of us suffering grievous injuries or God forbid, having the misfortune to cross paths with the LTTE, during a period in which civil unrest in the region and the dangers that accompanied it rose to devastating highs. I find myself slightly amused with one interesting little anecdote though, this remains the first and only recorded incident in which the Department of Wildlife Conservation had taken under its custody, an oxen cart!

This story serves as a brief telling in highlighting the exemplary courage and unparalleled dedication of the people who devote their lives to the care of our beloved wildlife parks.



Mr. Ranjith Sisira Kumara



Although Mr. Ranjith Sisira Kumara joined the casual Assistant Bungalow Keeper on November 25, 1981, he had qualifications of a Wildlife Ranger at the time. After nearly a year of service at Wilpattu National Park, was promoted to Kumana National Park as a Wildlife Ranger. He worked there for about three years and then at Yala National Park for seven years. Randenigala, Iginiyagala, Kataragama site, Hikkaduwa Marine National Park, Kalpitiya are some of the other places where he worked.

Ranjith Sisira Kumara is a clever Wildlife Ranger as well as a skilled diver. He has also made about 1,200 arrests. He has been active in wildlife litigation and has brought victory to the Department of Wildlife in a number of cases. It is a work he does very willingly.

Mr. Ranjith Sisira Kumara, who has passed the Wildlife Management Certificate Course at the Open University of Sri Lanka, has won gold medals as the batch top of three Certificate and Diploma Courses conducted by the Department. He has also won the International 'Paddy' Certificate for Swimming and Diving and has also won certificates from the Sri Lanka Special Task Force (STF) for being an accomplished sniper.

Ranjith Sisira Kumara and his wife has three daughters. He resides in Habaraduwa, Galle.



Kumana National Park

The dry zone is one of the most unique climatic zones in Sri Lanka. This is due to its inherent biodiversity. Sri Lanka has been able to occupy a leading position among the countries rich in biodiversity due to the ecologically diverse forest system scattered throughout the island.

Biodiversity similar to Yala National Park is found in Kumana National Park as well. Comparing the two national parks, Kumana National Park is home to a number of aquatic ecosystems that are not even found in terrestrial ecosystems. Therefore, more diversity of amphibians as well as aquatic life can be seen in Kumana National Park. Located on the beautiful coastline to the east and southeast with lush green this park is known as a bird paradise. Kumana National Park was declared in 1938 as a very important breeding ground for birds in Sri Lanka.

Kumana National Park falls under the Ampara and Moneragala administrative Districts, within the Pottuvil Electorate and the Panama Divisional Secretariat area. In 1969, it became a National Park, expanding up to 17,863.4 hectares in the year 1970. As of 05th July 2006, it has expanded to 35,665 hectares.

The Kumana Park is physically separated from the Yala National Park by the Kumbukkan Oya. Kumana National Park starts from Kudumbigala Okada and extends to Kumbukkan Oya, beyond which is Section II of Yala National Park. Therefore, Kumana National Park is also known as Yala East Park.



There are no high peaks here and you can see beautiful Rocky Mountains everywhere. Stone hills such as Kudumbigala, Bambaragasthalawa, Bagura, Kongala and Kiripokunu Hela bring a strange charm to the forest. Kumana National Park with its grasslands, coastal vegetation, rivers, forests, estuaries and thorn shrubs receives the highest rainfall during the Northeast monsoon season. It fills the lakes such as Okanda, Thunmulla, Divulpallama, Eraminiya Wewa, Aluth Wewa and Bakmi Wewa. Kumana Villu formed around the Kumbukkan Oya estuary is a world famous Villu covering about 500 acres. Kumana Villus are submerged in seawater from time to time. The Park is home to about 20 lakes, lagoons and forests, which are ideal for many species of birds. The depth of the lagoons is less than 2 m.



Lagoon

Kumana National Park is located 391 km southeast of Colombo, close to the coast. The average annual temperature is around 27.30 degrees Celsius and the average annual rainfall is about 1,300 mm.

The origin of this area which belongs to an ancient civilization dating back to around the 3rd century goes back to the time of the Magama Kingdom. Stone inscriptions dating back to the 1st and 2nd centuries have been found around the area. Kumana National Park is located on the same road of the Kataragama Hindu Kovil, which is traditionally visited by Hindu devotees on annual Pada Yatra.



When the biodiversity is considered, there are about 223 species of plants. Kon (*Sheleichera oleosa*), Halmilla (*Berrya cordifolia*), Malittan (*Salvadora persica*), Thimbiri (*Diospyros malabarica*), Puswel (*Entada pursaetha*), Flame lily (*Gloriosa superba*), Palu (*Manilkara hexandra*), Ceylon Satain wood (*Chloroxylon sweietenia*), Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) and Sacred fig (*Ficus religiosa*) as large plants, as well as in coastal areas plants like Wara (*Calotropis procera*), Katuikill (*Acanthus ilicifolius*), Bin thaburu (*Ipomoea pescaprae*) can be seen and in freshwater ponds aquatic plants such as Olu (*Nymphaea nouchali*) and Lotus (*Nelum bonucifera*) are a sight to behold.

Kumana National Park is one of the most important and popular Bird National Parks in Sri Lanka, mainly due to its diverse migratory birds. More than 430 endemic, resident and migratory bird species are recorded in Sri Lanka. Bird watchers can easily observe over 200 species of birds here. During the April-July period, tens of thousands of Sri Lankan birds flock to the Kumana swamp to lay their eggs. Large flocks of native aquatic birds including the Purple heron (*Ardea purpurea*), the Great egret (*Casmerodius albus*), and the Indian pond- horon (*Ardeola grayii*). To take. Migratory birds come here but they do not lay eggs here. Common birds include the Black-necked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*), Lesser adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*), Painted stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), Gray heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Purple swamp hen (*porphyria porphyrio*) Large numbers of aquatic birds such as Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*), Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Spotted billed pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*), Great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) and carnivorous birds of eagle family such as Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), Brahmin kite (*Haliaster indus*) are also found here.





Black-Necked Storn (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*)



**Caspian Tern
(*Hydroprogne caspia*)**



White Rumped Shama (*Upupa epops*)



Common Hoopoe (*Copsychus malabaricus*)

Kumana National Park is a famous National Park for Leopards (*Panthera pardus kotiya*). Tourists, wildlife enthusiasts and wildlife photographers regularly visit Kumana National Park to see as many leopards as there are in Yala and Wilpattu. With the intervention of the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Kumana National Park has become a Leopard paradise today. Known as a bird paradise in the past, this park is now a popular park where Leopards can be seen well.





Leopards (*Panthera pardus kotiya*)

In addition to leopards, Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Sloth bear (*Ursus ursinus*), Ruddy mongoose (*Herpestes smithii*), Mongoose (*Herpestes edwardsii*), Porcupine (*Hystrix indica*), Golden jackal (*Canis aureus*), Wild Boar (*Sus scrofa*), Animals such as Deer (*Muntiacus muntjak*) and Water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*) can also be seen there.



Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*)



Spotted deer (*Axis axis ceylonensis*)



Black naped rabbit (*Lepus nigricollis*)



A flock of butterflies on jeep road Kumana



The fish diversity in the freshwater lagoon ecosystem of this park is immense. Morella (*Zenarchopterus dispar*), Uduppuwa (*Butis butis*), Ganara (*Channa ara*), Kanaya (*Channa gachua*), Maspethiya (*Puntius sarana*) are among them. Shrimps, common prawns, lagoon crabs and little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and several carnivorous birds are also found in association with mangrove eco-systems here.

Blue whale (*Balaenoptera musculus*), Asian elephant (*Elephas maximus*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*), Estuarine crocodile (*Crocodylus porosus*), Leatherback Sea Turtle (*Demochelys coriacea*) and Black-necked stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*), which are named as the top seven Wild animals in Sri Lanka can be seen in this National Park.



Hawks Bill (*Eretmochelys imbricata*)

The Department of Wildlife Conservation has established a Turtle Conservation Center at Kirigalbe in the National Park for the conservation of turtle species that come to the Kumana beach. It has produced tens of thousands of baby turtles and released them into the ocean.



Located about 21 miles south of Pottuvil town, the access road stretches from Colombo, Ratnapura, Udawalawe, Wellawaya, Moneragala, Siyambalanduwa via Lahugala, Pottuvil, Panama, Okanda and Kudumbigala. The entrance to the park is in Panama; The Park office is located 22 kilometers from Panama. Two tourist lodges at Thummulla and Kirigalbe have been constructed for the convenience of tourists. Reservations can be made at the Head Office of the Department of Wildlife Conservation, Colombo. Camp sites have also been set up at Heraligasara, Kumbuka01, Kumbuka02, Galamuna and Moyataka to enjoy the natural beauty of the park.



Banglow near turtle centre



Thummulla Banglow



THE LIST OF THE NAMES OF ANIMALS

Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
අලියා	யானைகள்	Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
වලසා	கரடிகள்	Sloth Bear	<i>Melursus ursinus</i>
ශෝනා	மரைகள்	Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>
මීමනා	சருகு மான்கள்	Mouse Deer	<i>Moscheola meminna</i>
කළවැද්දා	ஆசிய மர நாய்கள்	Palm Civet	<i>Hermophroditus species</i>
උරලො	புனுகுப் பூனைகள்	Ring Tailed Civet	<i>Viverid species</i>
කිවලා	பொன்னிற குள்ள நரிகள்	Golden Jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
වල්බලා	காட்டு பூனைகள்	Jungle Cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>
ලිලො	குரங்குகள்	Toque Macaque	<i>macaca sinica</i>
ඉන්තුවා	முள்ளம்பன்றிகள்	Porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>
වදුරා	குரங்குகள்	Purple Faced Langur	<i>Presbytes senex</i>
කින් මුවා	புள்ளி மான்கள்	Spotted Deer	<i>Axis axis ceylonensis</i>
නිල්කල්මසා	நீலத் திமிங்கிலம்	Blue Whale	<i>Balaenoptera musculus</i>
කොවියා	புலிகள்	Leopard	<i>Panthera pardus kotiya</i>
උනහසුලුවා	தேவாங்கு	Gray Slender Loris	<i>Loris lydekkerrianus</i>



Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
වල් උරා	காட்டுப் பன்றிகள்	Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>
වල් මී හරකා	காட்டு எருமைகள்	Water Buffalo	<i>Bubalus bubalis</i>
හාලා / වල්හාලා	இந்திசுழி முயல் / இந்திய முழி முயல்	Indian Hare / Black Napped Rabbit	<i>Lepus nigricollis</i>
අළු වදුරා	சாம்பல் முகக் குரங்கு	Common Langur	<i>Semnopithecus entellus</i>
කලවැද්දා	ஆசிய மரநாய்	Toddy Cat	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>
කොළ දිවියා	துரும்பன் பூனை	Rusty- Spotted Cat	<i>Felis rubiginosa</i>
හඳුන් දිවියා	மீன்பிடிப் பூனை	Fishing Cat	<i>Prionailurus viverrinus</i>
මුගටියා	இந்திய சாம்பல் கீரிப்பிள்ளை	Mongoose	<i>Herpestes edwardsii</i>
හෝතමුවො	சிவந்த கீரி	Ruddy Mongoose	<i>Herpestes smithii</i>
අලිමානාලා	கருங்கழுத்து நாரை	Black-Necked Stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
කැළැහැලපෙන්නා	கொட்டிக்கால் வாலாட்டி	Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
සියකිකාරයා	பெரும் பூநாரை	Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
අළුපැස්තුඩුවා / තිත් හොට පැස්තුඩුවා	சாம்பல் நாரை	Spot-Billed Pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
පෙද කළු ගොහොඳු වින්නා	கருவால் மூக்கன்	Black Tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
අවිච්චියා	இந்திய தோட்டக் கள்ளான்	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>



Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
බිඞුහරයා	நீலவால் பஞ்சுருட்டான்	Bee Eater	<i>Merops species</i>
මහරන් ඔලෙවියා	கல்பொறுக்கி	Golden Plover	<i>Pulvialis fulva</i>
පාදිලිමානාලා	வெண்கழுத்து நாரை	Woolly Necked Stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
ලකු වැකියා	மஞ்சள் மூக்குநாரை	Painted Stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
කොකා විශේෂ	சாம்பல் நாரைவகை	Heron Species	<i>Ardea species</i>
කොකා විශේෂ	பெரிய கொக்கு வகை	Egret Species	<i>Egretta species</i>
කොකා විශේෂ	மஞ்சள் குருகு வகை	Bittern Species	<i>Ixobrychus species</i>
සැවුල්පෙද දියසැනා	நீளவால் இலைக் கோழி	Pheasant Tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
ඛනුරු මානාලා	சிறிய பெரு நாரை	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
වළි කුකුලා	இலங்கைக் காட்டுக் கோழி	Ceylon Jungle Fowl	<i>Gallus lafayetti</i>
හතන් කුකුලා	சின்னக் காட்டுக் கோழி	Sri Lanka Spur Fowl	<i>Galloperdix bicalcarata</i>
සිලිබිල්ලා	பொதுவான புள்ளிச் செங்கால் உள்ளான்	Shanka and Sand Pipers	<i>Tringa Species</i>
කලපු කොකා	சாம்பல் நாரை	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
මහ සුදු පැස්කුඩුලා	பெரிய வெள்ளை நாரை	Great White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>
ගිරා මලින්තා	இலங்கை தொங்கும் கிளி	Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>



Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
ලංකා මුදුන් බොර දෙමලිව්වා	பழுப்புத் தலைச் சிலம்பன்	Brown-Capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuscicapillum</i>
අළු කැදැන්නා	இலங்கை சாம்பல் இருவாய்ச்சி	Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyceros gingalensis</i>
මලුව රතු කොට්ටෝරුවා	கிரிம்ஸன் ப்ரென்டட் குக்குறுவான்	Crimson-Fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima rubricapilla</i>
හීස කළු කොණ්ඩියා	செந்தொண்டைச் சின்னான்	Black- Crested Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
දුම්බොන්නා	பனங்காடை	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>
වතරතු මල්කොහා	சென்முகப் பூங்குயில்	Red- Faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus</i>
රන් නළල් කොට්ටෝරුවා	குக்குறுவான்	Yellow-Fronted Barbet	<i>Megalaima flavifrons</i>
ශ්‍රී ලංකා සිළු මහාකවුඩා	தீக்காக்கை	Sri Lanka Trogon	<i>Harpactes fasciatus</i>
මුහුණත උකුස්සා	செம்பருந்து	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
පොරෝ කැදැන්නා	மலபார் சாம்பல் இருவாய்ச்சி	Malabar Hornbill	<i>Ocyceros griseus</i>
රජ අළු හීස් මසුකුස්සා	சாம்பல் தலை மீன்பிடிக்க கழுகு	Grey Headed Eagle	<i>Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus</i>
වත නිල් මල් කොහා	நீல முகச் செண்பகம்	Blue – Faced Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus viridirostris</i>
හීන් තඹ සේරුවා	சிறிய சீழ்க்கைச்சிரவி	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>
කහ යටිමල් කිරලා	மஞ்சள் மூக்கு ஆள்காட்டி	Yellow Wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanelius malabaricus</i>
පොරෝ දැකැන්නා	மலபார் கறுப்பு வள்ளை இருவாய்ச்சி	Malabar Pied Horn Bill	<i>Anthracoceros coronatus</i>
ළය රන් බට ගොයා	செம்மஞ்சள் மார்புடைய பச்சைப்புறா	Orange Breast Edgreen Pigeon	<i>Treron bicinctus</i>



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පෙරළි කොණ්ඩකුස්සා	குடுமிப் பருந்து	Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>
කරවැල් කොකා	செந்நாரை	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
ලොකුසුදුකොකා	பெரிய கொக்கு	Great Egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
කණ කොකා	இந்திய குளத்துக் கொக்கு	Indian Pond- Horon	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
හීන්මානාලා	சிறுத்த பெரு நாரை	Lesser Adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
අළු කොකා	சாம்பல் நாரை	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>
පොදු දම් කිකලා	நீலத் தாழைக் கோழி	Purple Swamp Hen	<i>porphyrio porphyrio</i>
පුළු දිය කාලා	சின்ன நீர்க்காகம்	Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
මහ දියකාලා	பெரிய நீர்க்காகம்	Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>
කුරුළු ගොයා	வைரி	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>
පොරෝලුවා	கொண்டலாத்தி	Common Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>
කස්බියානු මුහුදු ලිහිණියා	கஸ்பியன் ஆலா	Caspian Tern	<i>Hydroprogne caspia</i>
වළු පොල්කිව්වා	சோலைபாடி	White Rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
අලු කොකා	சின்னக் கொக்கு	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
නිල් පෙද බිඟුහරයා	நீலவால் பஞ்சருட்டான்	Blue Tailed Bee Eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
මොණරා	இந்திய மயில்	Indian Pea Cock	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>



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කාරකාඉබ්බා	நட்சத்திர ஆமைகள்	Star Tortoise	<i>Testudo elegans</i>
හැලකිඹුලා	சதுப்பு நில முதலை	Mugger Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
ගැටකිඹුලා	உவர் நீர் முதலை	Estuarine Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>
ගරා කටුස්සා	தோட்டப் பல்லிகள்	Oriental Garden Lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
පලා කටුස්සා	பொதுவான பச்சை வன பல்லி	Common Green Forest Lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>
තොල විසිතුරු කටුස්සා	சிவப்பு உதட்டுப் பல்லி	Red Lipped Lizard	<i>Calotes ceylonensis</i>
හිරළවා	அரணை	Skink	<i>Lankascincicus fallax</i>
පිඹුරා	மலைப் பாம்பு	Python	<i>Python molurus</i>
කලගොයා	உடும்பு	Land Monitor Lizard	<i>Varanus bengalensis</i>
කරගොයා	நீர் உடும்பு	Asian Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>
ලක්හිරළවා	இலங்கை அரணை	Sripada Forest Skink	<i>Lankascincicus sp</i>
පිණුම් කටුස්සා	பெரிய காது இல்லாத பல்லி	Earle's Lizard	<i>Otocryptis wiegmanni</i>
නාගයා	நாகம்	Cobra	<i>Cobra cobra</i>
පොලං විශේෂයක්	புடையன் பாம்பு	Viper Sps	
කොළ කැස්බෑවා	தோணியாமை	Green Sea Turtle	<i>Chelonia mydas</i>
බටු කැස්බෑවා	ஒலிவ நிறச் சிற்றாமை,	Olive Ridley Sea Turtle	<i>Lepidochelys olivacea</i>

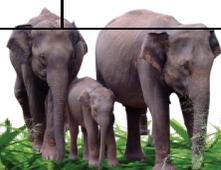


Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
දාර කැස්බෑලා	பேராமை	Leather Backed Sea Turtle	<i>Demochelys coriacea</i>
ඔලුගෙඩි කැස්බෑලා	பெருந்தலைக் கடலாமை	Logger Head	<i>Caretta caretta</i>
පොතු කැස්බෑලා	அழுங்காமை	Hawks Bill	<i>Eretmochelys imbricata</i>
ලංකා බැදි මැඩියා	இலங்கை மரத் தவளை	Sri Lanka Wood Frog	<i>Rana gracilis</i>
ගෙඩි විශේෂ	தவளை வகைகள்	Frog and Toad	<i>Frog and toad species</i>
දරෙ දණ්ඩා	இலங்கை பறக்கும் பாம்பு	Sri Lanka Fling Snake	<i>Chrysopelea taprobanica</i>
ගල්පාඩියා	கல்பாடியா	Ceylon Log Sucker	<i>garra ceylonensis</i>
මොරුලො	மொரெல்லா	Morella	<i>Zenarchopterus dispar</i>
උඩුප්පුවා	உடப்புவா	Uduppuwa	<i>Butis butis</i>
ගංආරා	பூவிரால்	Ganara	<i>Channa ara</i>
කන‍යා	கனயா	Kanaya	<i>Channa gachua</i>
මස්පෙතියා	மஸ்பெதியா	Maspathiya	<i>Puntius sarana</i>
කුනිසියා	தசக்காலி ஓட்டு மீன்கள்	Shrimp	<i>Shrimp species</i>
ඉසියා	இறால்	Prawn	<i>Prawn species</i>
කලපු කකුළුලා	களப்பு நண்டு	Lagoon Crab	<i>Lagoon crab species</i>



THE LIST OF THE NAMES OF TREES

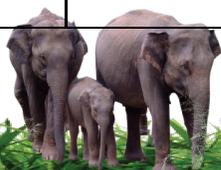
Sinhala Names	Tamil Names	English Names	Botanical Name
පළු	பாலை	Ceylon Iron wood	<i>Manilkara hexandra</i>
වීර	வீரை	Hedge Boxwood	<i>Drypetes sepiaria</i>
ලුණුවරණ	மாவிடங்கம்		<i>Crateva adansonii subsp. odora</i>
ඇහැල	கொன்றை	Indian Laburnum, Shower of gold	<i>Cassia fistula</i>
රණවරා	ஆவாரம்	Matara Tea	<i>Senna auriculata</i>
			(Synonym- Cassia auriculata)
කොහොඹ	வேப்பம்	Margosa, Neem	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>
දිවුල්	விலா	Wood Apple, Elephant apple	<i>Limonia acidissima</i>
අන්දර	பனை	–	Many species under family Fabacea
කුකුරුමාන්	மலை மாதுளை	Spiny Randia , Emetic–Nut, False Guava	<i>Catunaregam spinosa</i>
හීන්කරඹ	சிறு கிளா	–	<i>Carissa spinarum</i>
එරමිනියා	இலந்தை	–	<i>Ziziphus species</i>
හිරස්ස	வச்சிரவல்லி	Veld(t) Rape	<i>Cissus quadrangularis</i>
කිරිවැල්	வெண் நுனா	–	Families Apocynacea and Rubiaceae species
වල්පිච්ච	காட்டு மல்லிகை	–	<i>Jasminum species</i>
හතචාරිය	சாதாவாரி	–	<i>Asparagus racemosus</i>
වුරුන	முதிரை	Satin	<i>Chloroxylon swietenia</i>
මිල්ල	காட்டு நொச்சி	Milla	<i>Vitex altissima</i>



Sinhala Names	Tamil Names	English Names	Botanical Name
කලුමැදිරිය	பதுரன்கொலி	Kalumediriya	<i>Diospyros aquaesita</i>
හල්මිලේ	சாவண்டலை மரம்	Halmilla	<i>Berriya cordifolia</i>
කටු උණ	மூங்கிலிரிசி	katuUna	<i>Bambusa bambos</i>
වල් ඉඳි	காட்டு ஈச்சை	walindi	<i>Phoenix zeylanica</i>
පොහොන්	கினியா புல்	Pohon	<i>Panicum maximum</i>
කුකුරුමාන	மருக்கரை	Kukuruman	<i>Randia dumetorum</i>
කැප්පේටිය	ஆலை வகைகள்	Keppttia	<i>Croton sp</i>
වරා	நீல எருக்கு	Wara	<i>Calotropis gigantea</i>
වෙලන්	வெண்ணங்கு	Welan	<i>Pterospermum canescens</i>
කළුවර	கருங்காலி	Ebony	<i>Diospyros ebenum</i>
රතු වා	ரது வா	Rathuwa	<i>Cassia roxburghii</i>
කටුපිල	வெட்புலா	Katupila	<i>Flueggea leucopyrus</i>
කුඹුක්	வெண்மருது	kumbuk	<i>Terminalia arjuna</i>
තිඹිරි	பத்திரி	Thimbiri	<i>Diospyros malabarica</i>
මී	இலுப்பை	Mee	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i>
කිතුල්	கித்துள்	Fishtail Palm	<i>Caryota urens</i>



Sinhala Names	Tamil Names	English Names	Botanical Name
නා	நாகமரம்	Na Tree	<i>Mesua ferrea</i>
මලින්තන්	உகாய்	Malittan	<i>Salvadora persica</i>
කටුපිල	கொழுஞ்சி	Katupila	<i>Tephrosia purpurea</i>
මහ රාවණ රුවල	பெரிய இராவணன் மீசை	Maha Rawana Rewla	<i>Spinifex littoreus</i>
මුහුදු බිං තඹරු / බිං තඹරු	அடும்பு	Muhudu Bin Thamburu	<i>Ipomoea pescaprae</i>
විශ්ණුකාන්ති	விஷ்ணு கிரந்தி	Vishnu Kranthi	<i>Evolvulus alisinoides</i>
කළපු අන්දර	சீமைக் கருவேலம்	Andara	<i>Prosopis juliflora</i>
පතොක්	நாகதாளி	Cactus	<i>Opuntia dillenii</i>
හල්මිලේ	சாவண்டலை மரம்	Halmilla	<i>Berrya cordifolia</i>
කළුවර	கருங்காலி	Ebony	<i>Diospyros ebenum</i>
කොලං	மஞ்சக்கடம்பு	Kolon	<i>Haldina cordifolia</i>
කෝන්	பூக்கம்	Kon	<i>Schleichera oleosa</i>
කුණුවැල්ල	கரிமரம்	Kunumella	<i>Diospyros ovalifolia</i>
නෙල්ලි	நெல்லி	Nelli	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>
බුළු	தான்றி	Bulu	<i>Terminalia bellirica</i>
මැන්ඩෝරා	எருக்கலை	Mendora	<i>Hopea cordifolia</i>



Sinhala Names	Tamil Names	English Names	Botanical Name
මාන	மானா	Mana	<i>Cymbopogon confertiflorum</i>
ඉලුක්	தர்ப்பைப் புல்	Illuk	<i>Imperata cylindrica</i>
පොහොන්	நேப்பியர்ப்புல்	Pohon	<i>Pennisetum polystachion</i>
දමනිය	பலிசமரம்	Damaniya	<i>Grewia tiliifolia</i>
ගදපාන	உண்ணிச் செடி	Gandapana	<i>Lantana camara</i>
කුරතිය	சிறுநெல்லி	Kuratiya	<i>Phyllanthus polyphyllus</i>
කෝන්	பூக்கம்	Kon	<i>Sheleichera oleosa</i>
පුස්වැල්	யானைக் கொழிஞ்சி	Puswel	<i>Entada pursaetha</i>
නියගල	செங்காந்தன்	Flame Lily	<i>Gloriosa superba</i>
බුරුත	முதிரை	Ceylon Satain Wood	<i>Chloroxylon sweietenia</i>
නුග	ஆலமரம்	Banyan	<i>Ficus benghalensis</i>
බෝ	அரச மரம்	Sacred Fig	<i>Ficus religiosa</i>
වරා	வெள்ளெருக்கு	Wara	<i>Calotropis procera</i>
කටු ඉකිලි	கழிமுள்ளி	Katuikill	<i>Acanthus ilicifolius</i>
මීලු	நெய்தல் மலர்	Olu	<i>Nymphaea nouchali</i>
නෙළුම්	தாமரை	Lotus	<i>Nelumbo nucifera</i>



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Ministry of Wildlife and Forest Resources Conservation



Unforgettable wilderness recollections

The officers in the Department of Wildlife and Forest Conservation engage in their duties with absolute dedication. From ferocious predators on the hunt for prey, to herbivores on the run from predators, Sri Lanka's forests offer an extravagant theatre to observe the fascinating behavior of its diverse wildlife.

Unfortunately, the forests' grandiosity attracts the attention of poachers and trophy hunters. This inevitably leads to hostile interactions between the officials of the Departments of Wildlife and Forest Conservation and the poachers are not uncommon.

This article offers the reader a glimpse into the harrowing experiences of these officials and serves as a testament to their courage and fortitude in the presence of danger to raise public awareness to the perils involved when these dedicated public servants carry out their duty.

