

## Ahungalla and Sinharaja (Sri Lanka)

30 November – 8 December 2010

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Plate 1. Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*, 3 December 2010, Ahungalla, Sri Lanka (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

### Summary

This was a short holiday (7 nights) squeaked in just a month prior to departure. We (Danitsja Stapel and I) booked in advance a tour with Amilo Salgado (Birdwing Nature Tours) for two days. The rest was spent relaxing at the hotel, and we took a day tour booked via ARKE upon arrival. There are no trip reports I came across that mention Ahungalla and its possibilities on sea watching and other birding activities. Although in da Sila (1997). OBC bulletin 26, some information is provided. The visited Sinharaja reserve is well known, and numerous trip reports can be found when surfing the web. The weather in the planned holiday period is normally ok, but we had nearly daily heavy showers and only limited time it was sunny. On occasion it was windy. No itinerary was fixed in advance of wanted species, as no time was available prior to the trip to prepare a wanted list.

### Accommodations and transport

We stayed in two locations:

1. **Heritage Ahungalle:** five star accommodation. It was part of the package we purchased for the week. Seven nights (comfort class) including flight (comfort class) and transport to the hotel, was € 1.050, -- a person. We only booked for breakfast, and arranged the diner self. Drinks and food summed an extra € 150, - a person. The food (breakfast but also dinner buffet) was superb, and the service was at high level here.
2. **Martin's Simple Lodge:** This was booked by the private tour we took; we stayed a single night here. As it is indicated by the name, it is the opposite – but not bad – of the former hotel. No mosquitoes were encountered here (however, a mosquito net is present), only large numbers of termites where seen cruising around the lodge (in the pouring rain). The bed was hard, and it is handy to have a thin sleeping bag at hand when staying here. The food is simply wonderful and very tasty here.

Transport from the Colombo Airport to the Ahungalla Hotel was pre-arranged by our tour company (ARKE), and was carried out by a well-equipped air-conditioned bus. All was smoothly arranged at the airport, and after a other drop off, we drove (with two stops) in 5 hours to the resort (heavy traffic in Colombo). And the way back it was done in 2,5 hours by mini-bus, after picking up guests in two other hotels.

The day-tour that included visits to a Turtle hatchery, a river cruise and a visit towards the Dutch/English fort at Galle was pre-arranged (via ARKE) and carried out by a conventional air-conditioned car. This tour costs € 55, - a person (too high price, arrange this with the locals). We skipped the visits to a Mask Museum and Moonstone Factory.

During our two-day tour to Sinharaja, we travelled by a conventional air-conditioned car, and the last part to the Martin's Lodge by jeep (Very bumpy road, impossible with a conventional car). The tour € 135, -- a person, included transport, accommodation, lunch, dinner and breakfast, and entrance fees as the guiding, the only additional costs where the drinks as Martin's Simple Lodge and the eventual fees to the park guides.



**Plate 2.** Ceylon Swallow and **Plate 3.** Blue-tailed Bee-eater, 3 December 2010, both Ahungalla, Sri Lanka (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

## Itinerary

Species marked with a \*, are new species for me (Taken in account this is my first real Sri Lankan visit, a visit at 6 January 1999 to Colombo airport gave away Sri Lanka Swallow, Eastern Cattle Egret, House Crow, Common Kestrel, Oriental Skylark, Common Myna and Barn Swallow).

### 30 November & 1 December 2010

We departed with a delay of 1,5 hours, but arrived on time at Colombo. We flew with a plane from ARKEfly. The short stop - approximate 45 minutes - at Goa revealed: **Eastern Cattle Egret, House Crow, Barn Swallow** and (2) **\*Woolly-necked Storks**. When arriving at Colombo (1 December) we found our bus, and headed the 120 kms in 5 hours to our hotel. During the ride several **Indian Pond Herons, Striated Heron, Red-wattled lapwing, House Crow, Eastern Cattle Egrets, Barn Swallow, \*Indian Swiftlets, Asian Koel, Brahminy Kites, Common Myna** and other more common birds were observed. The last hour of daylight was spent sea-watching from the balcony of our hotel: Ahungalla Heritage Resort. Good passage of **Whiskered Tern, White-winged Tern, Greater Crested Tern, Sandwich Tern, Common Tern** and few **Little/Saunders Tern** were noted. A distant **Sooty/Bridled Tern** was the highlight of the sea-watch, and the only sighting of **Heuglin's Gull** (1) and **Brown-headed Gull** (3) for the week where done. Two **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters** were present in the hotel premises as **Barn Swallow**. New for me were two **\*White-bellied Drongo's**.

### 2 December

Early morning was spent at the balcony to sea-watch. The species seen yesterday were again seen in good numbers, and also some **Gull-billed Terns** were seen passing by. A single **Lesser Crested Tern** was the highlight of the few hours sea-watch. A small flock of **\*Yellow-billed Babblers, \*Brown-headed Barbet, \*Purple-rumped Sunbird, \*Pale-billed Flowerpecker** entertained me as two **Ceylon Swallows**. Also present like yesterday were **House Crow, Barn Swallow, Eastern Cattle Egret** and the two hawking **Blue-tailed Bee-eaters**. On occasion a **Brahminy Kite** passed by and a single **Brown-backed Needletail** and **Little Swift**.



Plate 4. Crested Hawk Eagle, 4 December 2010, somewhere between Ahangulla and Sinharaja (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

### 3 December

Recorded the same species (except for Lesser Crested Tern) as yesterday. Also a Land Monitor was seen. However, at 12:30 hours a single shearwater, was flying slowly from the north to the south, the bird was clearly feeding, and twice settled for a short period at sea. The ID was clinched at **Audubon's Shearwater**, a rare migrant to Sri Lankan waters according to the available literature.

*Description:* Small, short-winged shearwater, with a relative long tail, black above, and white below, a black patch on the side-breast and a black vent, pale axillaries and with broad trailing edge and tip and darker marking on inner wing. Bird identified from Persian Shearwater based on the pale axillaries and black above instead of brownish like Persian Shearwater.

#### 4 December

At 6:30 we appointed in advance a tour for two days into the Singhara Sinharaja Forest Reserve, Sabaragamuwa Province. Our guide Amilo Salgado (Birdwing nature tours) arrived well in time with his chauffeur. We decided to do some roadside birding when indicated by birds. At the various rice paddies, herons where abundant and regularly other birds where noted. Amongst the highlights we came across: two **\*Crested Hawk Eagle's**, **Asian Openbill**, **Crested Serpent Eagle**,



**Green Imperial Pigeon**, **\*Ceylon Hanging-parrot**, **Pheasant-tailed Jacana**, **\*Alexandrine Parakeet**, **Grey Wagtail**, **\*Southern Coucal**, **Ashy Woodswallow**, **Crested Treeswift**, **White-rumped Munia**, **Scaly-breasted Munia** and **\*Indian Black Robin** are notable. We stepped into a jeep in the park, and drove up to the park headquarters. Here we signed in, and then left uphill towards Martin's Simple Lodge. On our way to here, we stopped and a local villager showed us two **\*Ceylon Frogmouths** in the dense scrub. The first were seen nicely but obscure in the dense vegetation. After arrival at the lodge, we threw our luggage into our rooms, and set out for our first walk into the forest. Before entering the main entrance we

found a small feeding flock. Amongst the birds seen where: **\*Bright-green Warbler**, **\*Large-billed Leaf-warbler**,

**Emerald Dove**, **\*Brown-breasted Flycatcher**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher** and a **\*Ceylon Hill-Myna** were heard only. After registering at the entrance we found in less than 150 metres from the gate a large feeding flock. In the next hour we recorded in this group: **\*Malabar Trogon**, **\*Orange Minivet**, **\*Ceylon Blue Magpie**, **\*Legge's Flowerpecker**, **\*Ceylon White-eye**, **\*Ashy-headed Laughing-thrush**, **\*Ceylon Crested Drongo**, **Black-hooded Oriole**, **\*Red-faced Malkoha**, **\*Ceylon Scimitar-babbler**, **\*Brown-capped Babbler**, **\*Black-naped Blue Monarch**, **\*Ceylon Rufous Babbler**, **Pied Flycatcher-shrike** and **Asian Paradise Flycatcher**. From the latter various males and females where seen, white and dark morphs (possibly two races are involved). We then headed back for lunch. During lunch



at the lodge where two **Oriental Honey Buzzards** where seen, the food was delicious as the view of the forest from the balcony. We then headed back to the forest again and saw a **\*Black-rumped Flameback** flying over. Most species seen during the first round were located in a different feeding flock. Various **\*Spot-winged Ground-thrushes** as the odd **\*Indian Blue Robin** where seen scratching the forest floors. With a lot of persistence we saw two **\*White-faced Starlings** in the canopy. Various butterflies where seen during the day, and in special Blue Mormon and Tree Nymph stand out, as various sightings from Layards Squirrel and Purple-faced Leaf Monkey (darker then the monkeys seen two days prior to this sighting at our hotel). Also the vegetation was interesting for example the endemic but locally common pitcher plant *Nepenthes distillatoria* as the various orchids.



After seeing the starling, a giant downpour started and with our socks (like earlier during the day) filled with leeches we left for Martin's Simple Lodge. After a fine dinner we went for bed. The downpour lasted the most of the night. During the day also Green Forest Lizard, Kandyan Day Gecko, False Latern Fly, Giant Wood Spider and Giant Millepede where seen.

**Plate 4.** Crested Serpent Eagle, 4 December 2010, between Ahungalla and Sinharaja (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

**Plate 5.** Indian Black Robin, 4 December 2010, between Ahungalla and Sinharaja (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

**Plate 6.** Ceylon Jungle fowl, 4 December 2010, Sinharaja (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

## 5 December

We woke up just past five, to see the **Ceylon Blue Magpies** catching the insects at the balcony at Martins's Place. Many dead termites were lying on the floor, and its predators were present nearby. At 05:30 the birds arrived and approaching us in centimetres. Also during the first stint at the balcony, that also includes a nice breakfast: **Layards Parakeet**,



**Indian Swiftlet**, **Green-billed Coucal** and **Little Swift** were noted. When we left it had started raining again, and a stop at the entrance of the park (in the shelter) we found: **\*Ceylon Grey Hornbill**, **\*Gold-fronted Leafbird** and **Common Iora**. One of the inhabitants of the building located a fine Green Pit Viper *Trimeresurus trigonocephalus* on a broom. The walk in the drizzle brought us a: **Malabar Trogon**, **White-faced Starling**, **Ceylon Blue Magpie**, **Ceylon White-eye**, **Ceylon Crested-drongo**, **Spot-winged Ground-thrush**, **\*Yellow-fronted Barbet** and some other species also seen yesterday. Three species were heard only: **\*Ceylon Scaly Thrush**, **\*Ceylon Spurfowl** and various **Green-billed Coucals**. When at the entrance of the park, we came across a **Lesser Yellowname**, but despite some searches we could not see the bird properly in the telescope. A loud calling **Ceylon Spurfowl** was in front of



the balcony. In a large tree along the balcony a small feeding flock was located that included: **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch**, **Legge's Flowerpecker** and **\*Crimson-backed Flameback**. When in the forest in the morning we saw a nice Grizzled Giant Squirrel *Ratufa macroura melanochra* as a Dusky-striped Squirrel. After a lunch we headed slowly back towards Anhangulla, taken in account to try somewhat harder for Indian Pitta. When downhill we stopped for a nicely perched **\*Ceylon Small Barbet** and **Ceylong Hanging-parrot**, we decided to try for Indian Pitta, and within seconds a bird was found. It was nice to see **Indian Pitta** perched in a tree, a behaviour I haven't seen in a Pitta yet. At a single rice field, **Eastern Cattle Egret**,

**Intermediate**, **Great** and **Little Egret** were present and a little further a **Purple Heron**. Not like yesterday not a single **Brown Shrike** was noted, but **White-breasted Waterhen**, **Asian Openbill**, **Asian Palm Swift** and **Common Tailorbird** were well represented. Two new birds were close to each other a **\*Ceylon Green Pigeon** and **\*White-browed Fantail**. Our birding was extremely successful—we bagged twenty out of the thirty-three endemic birds currently recognised (according to *Birds of South Asia* by Rasmussen and Anderton). A late afternoon sea watch produced only the commoner terns.

### 6 December

Early morning was again spent sea-watching and like previous days, the same array of species was noted.

### 7 December

Today we took a tour, and after started in the nearby Turtle Hatchery, were loads of **Brahminy Kites** and **House Crows** where swarming on the premises we left for the River Cruise that departed from the lake mouth 5 kms to the south. At the river cruise except for Water Monitor (3), **Brahminy Kite**, **Common Kingfisher**, **White-throated Kingfisher**, **Whiskered Tern**, **Striated Heron**, **Indian Pond Heron**, **Indian Shag** and some unidentifiable birds were noted. Also some large Giant Fruit Bat were encountered. We then left for the old Dutch fort at Galle. Here we did some tourist stuff encountering a single **Whiskered Tern** and loads of **House Crows**. When returned we heard the odd Asian Koel, and we recorded like every day Palm Squirrel.

### 8 December

We left in the early morning our hotel to depart for home. At the airport a (Brown) Mongoose was seen. A total of 22 hours was needed to get home.



Plate 9. Ceylon Blue Magpie, 5 December 2010, Sinharaja (© Justin JFJ Jansen)

## List of birds seen during the holiday (followed Rasmussen and Anderton 2005)

1.	<b>Audubon's Shearwater</b>	<i>Puffinus iherminieri</i>
2.	<b>Indian Shag</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
3.	<b>Little Cormorant</b>	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
4.	<b>Little Egret</b>	<i>Egretta g garzetta</i>
5.	<b>Great Egret</b>	<i>Egretta a alba</i>
6.	<b>Intermediate Egret</b>	<i>Egretta i intermedia</i>
7.	<b>Eastern Cattle Egret</b>	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>
8.	<b>Purple Heron</b>	<i>Ardea p purpurea</i>
9.	<b>Indian Pond Heron</b>	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>
10.	<b>** Striated Heron</b>	<i>Butorides striata chloriceps</i>
11.	<b>Asian Openbill</b>	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
12.	<b>** Brahminy Kite</b>	<i>Haliastur i indus</i>
13.	<b>Oriental Honey Buzzard</b>	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis</i>
14.	<b>** Crested Serpent Eagle</b>	<i>Spilornis cheela spilogaster</i>
15.	<b>* Crested Hawk Eagle</b>	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
16.	<b>* Ceylon Spurfowl</b>	<i>Galloperdix bicalcarata</i>
17.	<b>* Ceylon Junglefowl</b>	<i>Gallus lafayetii</i>
18.	<b>White-breasted Waterhen</b>	<i>Amaurornis p phoenicurus</i>
19.	<b>** Red-wattled Lapwing</b>	<i>Vanellus indicus lankae</i>
20.	<b>Whimbrel</b>	<i>Numenius p phaeopus</i>
21.	<b>Heuglin's Gull</b>	<i>Larus heuglini</i>
22.	<b>Brown-headed Gull</b>	<i>Larus brunnicephalus</i>
23.	<b>Little Tern</b>	<i>Sterna albifrons pusilla</i>
24.	<b>Common Tern</b>	<i>Sterna hirundo minussensis</i>
25.	<b>Gull-billed Tern</b>	<i>Gelochelidon n nilotica</i>
26.	<b>Sandwich Tern</b>	<i>Thalasseus s sandvicensis</i>
27.	<b>Lesser Crested Tern</b>	<i>Thalasseus b bengalensis</i>
28.	<b>Greater Crested Tern</b>	<i>Thalasseus bergii velox</i>
29.	<b>Whiskered Tern</b>	<i>Chlidonias hybridus javanicus</i>
30.	<b>White-winged Black-tern</b>	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>
31.	<b>** Rock Pigeon</b>	<i>Columba livia intermedia</i>
32.	<b>** Green Imperial Pigeon</b>	<i>Ducula aenea pusilla</i>
33.	<b>** Spotted Dove</b>	<i>Streptopelia chinensis suratensis</i>
34.	<b>** Emerald Dove</b>	<i>Chalcophaps indica robinsoni</i>
35.	<b>* Ceylon Green-pigeon</b>	<i>Treron phayrei</i>
36.	<b>* Ceylon Hanging-parrot</b>	<i>Loriculus beryllinus</i>
37.	<b>* Layard's Parakeet</b>	<i>Psittacula calthropae</i>
38.	<b>* Rose-ringed Parakeet</b>	<i>Psittacula krameri manillensis</i>
39.	<b>* Alexandrine Parakeet</b>	<i>Psittacula e eupatria</i>
40.	<b>Asian Koel</b>	<i>Eudynamis s scolopacea</i>
41.	<b>* Red-faced Malkoha</b>	<i>Phaenicophaeus pyrrhocephalus</i>
42.	<b>* Southern Coucal</b>	<i>Centropus parroti</i>
43.	<b>* Green-billed Coucal</b>	<i>Centropus chlororhynchus</i>
44.	<b>* Ceylon Frogmouth</b>	<i>Batrachostomus moniliger</i>
45.	<b>Crested Treeswift</b>	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
46.	<b>** Asian Palm-swift</b>	<i>Cypsiurus b balasiensis</i>
47.	<b>* Indian Swiftlet</b>	<i>Aerodramus unicolor</i>
48.	<b>** Little Swift</b>	<i>Apus affinis singalensis</i>
49.	<b>** Brown-throated Needle-tail</b>	<i>Hirundapus giganteus indicus</i>
50.	<b>* Malabar Trogon</b>	<i>Harpactes f fasciatus</i>
51.	<b>White-throated Kingfisher</b>	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis fusca</i>
52.	<b>** Common Kingfisher</b>	<i>Alcedo atthis taprobana</i>
53.	<b>Blue-tailed Bee-eater</b>	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
54.	<b>* Ceylon Grey Hornbill</b>	<i>Ocyceros gingalensis</i>
55.	<b>* Ceylon Small Barbet</b>	<i>Megalaima rubricapillus</i>
56.	<b>* Yellow-fronted Barbet</b>	<i>Megalaima flavifrons</i>
57.	<b>* Brown-headed Barbet</b>	<i>Megalaima z zeylanica</i>
58.	<b>** Lesser Yellow-nape</b>	<i>Picus chlorolophus wellsii</i>
59.	<b>* Black-rumped Flameback</b>	<i>Dinopium benghalense psarodes</i>
60.	<b>* Crimson-backed Flameback</b>	<i>Chrysocolaptes stricklandi</i>
61.	<b>* Indian Pitta</b>	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
62.	<b>Barn Swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo r rustica</i>
63.	<b>Ceylon Swallow</b>	<i>Hirundo hyperythra</i>
64.	<b>Grey Wagtail</b>	<i>Motacilla cinerea melanope</i>
65.	<b>Ashy Woodswallow</b>	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>
66.	<b>** Pied Flycatcher-shrike</b>	<i>Hemipus picatus leggei</i>
67.	<b>* Orange Minivet</b>	<i>Pericrocotus f flammeus</i>
68.	<b>** Red-vented Bulbul</b>	<i>Pycnonotus cafer haemorrhousus</i>
69.	<b>* Black-capped Bulbul</b>	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
70.	<b>* Yellow-browed Bulbul</b>	<i>Iole indica guglielmi</i>
71.	<b>** Common Iora</b>	<i>Aegithina tiphia multicolour</i>

72. ** Gold-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons insularis</i>
73. Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius c cristatus</i>
74. ** Black-naped Blue Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea ceylonensis</i>
75. ** Asian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi ceylonensis</i>
76. ** White-browed Fantail	<i>Rhipidura aureola compressirostris</i>
77. * Spot-winged Ground-thrush	<i>Zoothera spiloptera</i>
78. * Ceylon Scaly Thrush	<i>Zoothera imbricata</i>
79. * Indian Blue Robin	<i>Luscinia brunnea</i>
80. ** Oriental Magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis ceylonensis</i>
81. * Indian Black Robin	<i>Saxicoloides ffulicatus</i>
82. * Brown-breasted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa muttui</i>
83. ** Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica poonensis</i>
84. * Ashy-headed Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax cinereifrons</i>
85. * Yellow-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis taprobanus</i>
86. * Ceylon Rufous Babbler	<i>Turdoides rufescens</i>
87. * Ceylon Scimitar-babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus melanurus</i>
88. * Brown-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum fuscapillus</i>
89. Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus s sutorius</i>
90. * Bright-green Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus nitidus</i>
91. * Large-billed Leaf Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magnirostris</i>
92. Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta ffrontalis</i>
93. * Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorynchos ceylonense</i>
94. * Legge's Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum vincens</i>
95. * Ceylon White-eye	<i>Zosterops ceylonensis</i>
96. * Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma z zeylonica</i>
97. ** White-rumped Munia	<i>Lonchura s striata</i>
98. * Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura p punctulata</i>
99. House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
100. ** Black-hooded Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthornus ceylonensis</i>
101. * White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens leucopygialis</i>
102. * Ceylon Crested Drongo	<i>Dicurus lophorinus</i>
103. * White-faced Starling	<i>Sturnia albofrontata</i>
104. Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis melanostemus</i>
105. * Ceylon Hill-myna	<i>Gracula ptilogenys</i>
106. House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens protegatus</i>
107. * Indian Jungle Crow	<i>Corvus culminatus</i>
108. * Ceylon Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa ornata</i>



Plate 10. White-rumped Munia, 4 December 2010, somewhere between Ahangulla and Sinharaja (© Justin JFJ Jansen)