

Dubai and Sri Lanka 2011

John and Thomas Yates

Sunday 16th October 2011

As our holiday to Dubai and Sri Lanka had been a great success in 2010, we took the same early morning flight from London Heathrow to Dubai with Emirates as last year. This time though we stayed overnight at the Hotel Suite Of The Emirates. After checking into the Hotel we just had time for shopping and a quick Panda Chinese or Mexican meal at the Mall of the Emirates, which was located next door, before calling it a day.

Monday 17th October 2011

Last year we didn't have time to visit the old quarter of Dubai, so we used the newly opened Metro to visit the Gold Souk before catching bus 28C to Al Mamzar Park where we had a couple of hours to explore the area.

The combined metro/bus ticket costs 16AED each. nB ensure that you swipe this ticket for every journey or you risk being fined.

Birds seen in the park were Feral Pigeon, Collared Dove, Laughing Dove, Common Myna, Pied Myna, Indian Roller, Hoopoe, Grey Francolin, House Crow, Red vented Bulbul, White Cheeked Bulbul, Tree Pipit, Ring Necked Parakeet, Red Wattled Lapwing, Common Sandpiper, House Sparrow, Purple Sunbird (female), White Wagtail, Isabelline Shrike (Turkestan), Little Egret & a Swift species.



Hoopoe in Al Mamzar Park

Tuesday 18th October 2011

We took an early morning flight from Dubai to Colombo before transferring to the Chaaya Hotel in Habarana.

A combination of a delay of two hours in Dubai due to fog, a transfer time of five hours from Colombo airport to the Chaaya Hotel in Habarana by minibus, heavy rain and very difficult driving road conditions meant that we didn't arrive at the hotel until well after dark

Driving in Sri Lanka is not to be recommended due to the many additional road hazards not seen in the UK – pedestrians, numerous buses, Tut-Tuts, bicycles without lights, buses, motorbikes and death defying dogs. Constant overtaking on the narrow roads is expected.

Familiar species from last year were seen on route. An Indian Roller was seen at the airport as we taxied along the runway to the embarkation gate. House Crow, Brown Headed Barbet, White Bellied Drongo, Yellow Billed Babbler, Indian Pond Heron, Common Myna, Spotted Dove, Feral Pigeon, Cattle Egret, Great White Egret, White Breasted Kingfisher, Ring Necked Parakeet & a Cormorant species were all seen.

Wednesday 19th October 2011

After breakfast we took a walk through the Chaaya and Cinnamon Hotel Grounds to the adjacent Cinnamon farm, where they grow their own vegetables for the hotel.

Palm Squirrel, Giant Squirrel, Water Monitor, a troupe of Torque Macaques and Tufted Grey Langurs were common in the hotel grounds.

Birds seen were Spot Billed Pelicans (flight), Little Cormorant, Indian Cormorant, Oriental Darter, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret, Great White Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Asian Openbill, Black Headed Ibis, Little Grebe, Lesser Whistling Duck, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Brahminy Kite, White Bellied Fish Eagle, White Breasted Waterhen, Purple Swampphen, Pheasant Tailed Jacana, Common Sandpiper, Spotted Dove, Ring Necked Parakeet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, House Crow, Stork Billed Kingfisher, White breasted Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, Little Green Bee Eater, Chestnut Crowned Bee Eater, Coppersmith Barbet, Brown Headed Barbet, Brown Capped Woodpecker, Asian Palm Swift, **Common Woodshrike**, Red Vented Bulbul, White Browed Bulbul, Common Iora, Jerdon's Leafbird, Black Hooded Oriole, Oriental Magpie Robin, Indian Black Backed Robin, Yellow Billed Babbler, Grey Breasted Prinia, Plain Prinia, Asian Paradise Flycatcher, White Browed Fantail, Tickells's Blue Flycatcher, Purple Rumped Sunbird, Purple Sunbird, Oriental White Eye, Thick Billed Flowerpecker, Scally Breasted Munia, Black headed Munia & Common Myna .

Late evening/dusk. (6pm)

I went for a walk down to the south end of the lake through the hotel grounds and found a large roost of Herons, Egrets, Cormorants, Ibises and a few Asian Openbill storks. There is an elevated platform but views are best from the ground as the view from the platform is obscured by trees.

Thursday 20th October 2011

The previous afternoon I booked myself on to a guided early morning bird walk with a resident hotel naturalist.

The guide met me promptly at 7am at reception and we did the same walk that I had done the previous day.

New birds of note were Little Swift, Barn Swallow, Coppersmith Barbet, **Sri Lankan Pompadour Green Pigeon**, Malabar Pied Hornbill & Indian Pitta.

In the afternoon we took the obligatory ride along the north side of the tank on Rani the elephant. We saw lots of lizards and Tricoloured Munias, while Rani enjoyed her meal of fresh bananas. 2500rupees/person for about an hour.

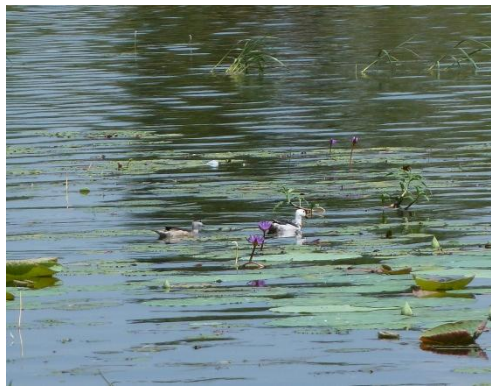
Thomas spotted an Emerald Dove feeding on the ground near reception and an Imperial Green Pigeon near the swimming pool.

The rest of the holiday was characterised by hot dry mornings with heavy rain from 3 o'clock onwards.

Friday 21st October 2011

I was out again around 6.45 for a walk around the grounds. I was delayed near the BBQ area in the Chaaya grounds where a large tree held both Barbets and at least 10 Pompadour Sri Lanka Green Pigeons. After seeing this Sri Lankan endemic, I walked on to the Cinnamon farm where pishing produced 2 Indian Pittas, White Browed Fantail, Common Tailorbird, Brown Shrike & Brown Flycatcher. A gardener who looks after the butterfly garden introduced himself and it was soon clear that he was a knowledgeable birder. He showed me 2 Dark Fronted Babblers, Pale Billed Flowerpecker and a fleeting Tawny Breasted Babbler. A Dark Breasted Prinia was seen well.

At lunchtime a family party of Cotton Pygmy Goose fed close to shore.



Cotton Pygmy Goose at Chaaya Hotel

In the afternoon it was time for our trip to Kaudulla NP on a jeep safari. Kaudulla is recommended to Minneriya NP as the Elephant sightings are higher in Kaudulla in late October. We were not disappointed as we saw numerous Elephants and a Water buffalo with calf!! Birds of note were Spot Billed Pelican, Great Cormorant, Herons and Egrets, Woolly Necked Stork, Indian Peafowl (18), Black Winged Stilt, Whiskered Tern, Blue Faced Malkoha, Ring Necked Parakeet, Malabar Pied Hornbill, Little Green Bee Eaters, Oriental Skylark, Grey Heron, Fan Tailed Warbler & Paddyfield Pipit.

Raptors seen during the drive were Brahminy Kite, Crested Serpent Eagle, White Bellied Fish Eagle & Grey Headed Fish Eagle.

A Changeable Hawk Eagle was seen during the return journey on top of a telegraph pole.

A night walk at the hotel revealed a Sri Lankan Polecat and a Mongoose.

Saturday 22nd October 2011

We nearly missed our planned trip to Sigiriya as the alarm failed to go off and we needed a phone call from reception to alert us to the time. After an exhausting climb up the 1200 steps we made it to the top where we had great views over the surrounding countryside. Amazingly just when I was about to give up, I spotted a stunning Shaheen half hidden in the foliage near the 'Kings Throne'. Lucky!!

Shaheen, Alpine Swift, Little Swift & Woolly Necked Stork.



Shaheen at Sigiriya (TY)

Back at the hotel, Thomas again heard and then found two Imperial Green Pigeons.

We took an afternoon walk around the far side of the lake past the establishment offering elephant rides.

Birds seen from the path used by the elephants were Yellow Eyed Babbler, Indian Paradise Flycatcher (male), Brown Headed Barbet and Black Headed Munia. Crossing the stream near the dam at the end of the path brought me out into some scrub that held Small Minivet (5), Ashy Prinia, Golden Fronted Leafbird, Large Cuckoo Shrike, a distant Black Headed Cuckoo Shrike, Little Green Bee Eater, Greater Coucal, Black Rumped Flameback, Indian Pitta & numerous Black Hooded Orioles.

Additionally 5 Black Necked Ibis flew over to roost and two White Bellied Sea eagles, five Indian Peafowl, Purple Swamphen & a Pheasant Tailed Jacana were seen.

Sunday 22nd October 2011

Up at 6.30 for a Nature Trek excursion in the local countryside. After a 5 minute Tuk-Tuk ride from the hotel, we were dropped off and took a canoe ride in the blazing heat across a lily covered tank – not fun!! Lots of Jacanas, including one with a long tail, and Indian Pond Herons were seen. Next up was a 30 minute walk around the local countryside to meet some local farmers, where Munias and Silverbills were common. We tried fresh coconut juice and saw how the famers need to build shelters up in trees for protection from the grazing Elephants. We got the canoe again to transfer us back across the tank and then finished with a ride on an ox pulled cart.

Indian Silverbill, Shikra, White Rumped Munia & Fan Tailed Warbler were seen.

An afternoon trek around the lake as yesterday gave further sightings of Yellow Eyed Babbler & Tawny Bellied Babbler. More Munias and Silverbills were seen in one of the areas where the elephants are housed overnight.

Monday 23rd October 2011

Changeable Hawk Eagle, White Browed Fantail & Indian Pitta were noted on a final early morning bird walk at the farm with the same farmer I had met earlier in the week.

A Tickell's Blue Flycatcher, with Oriental Magpie Robin and Red Vented Bulbul, was near the deluxe room on the edge of the tank. A Grey Wagtail was near the coach park at the rocky mound.

After lunch we transferred to the Ranweli Hotel, Nogombo.

Tuesday 22nd October 2011

Mohinder has now left the Ranweli Hotel who now have two new 'in house' naturalists, Aruna and Senaka.

We took a 7am early morning boat ride around the Ranweli area. Notable sightings in addition to those seen last year were Yellow Bittern (3), Spoonbill (immature), Stone Curlew (3),

An afternoon walk along the beach gave the same three wader species as twelve months ago, Common Sandpiper, a flock of Lesser Sand Plover & Whimbrel.

Wednesday 23rd October 2011

Due to the internal Sri Lankan unrest, Wilpattu National park was closed for 16 years. As it has now reopened, Ranwelli is offering day trips to visit the park at \$200/person. Thomas was free. We hoped for the advertised Leopards but although we were not successful we saw a huge variety of birds and other wildlife.

We arranged a wake up phone call for 2.30am and thirty minutes later we were on the road. I slept most of way and we arrived in good time for our wildlife safari. The park opens from 6am – 6pm. We transferred from our minibus to an all-terrain jeep, picked up a Forest guide/spotter and spent the next 9 hours exploring the park.

The park is a mixture of low forest/scrub that has a number of natural lakes interspersed. We saw Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Sambur Deer, Mugger Crocodiles, Tortoise, Grey Mongoose, Tufted Grey Langurs, numerous Land Monitors and a Black Naped Hare.

Birdlife was most abundant at the waterholes. There was a lot of interesting sounds coming from the forest but we didn't get much chance to actually see what was making the calls.

Spot Billed Pelican, Indian Cormorant, Oriental Darter, Purple Heron, Grey Heron, Little Egret, Great Egret, Cattle Egret, Indian Pond Heron, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Woolly Necked Stork, Lesser Adjuvant, Black Necked Ibis, Spoonbill, Little Grebe, Brahminy Kite, Grey necked Fish Eagle, White Bellied Fish Eagle, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Shikra, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Indian Peafowl, Black

Winged Stilt, Great Thick-knee, Red Wattled Lapwing, Pacific Golden Plover, Kentish Plover, Lesser Sand Plover, Black Tailed Godwit, Redshank, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Common Snipe, Curlew Sandpiper, Orange Breasted Green Pigeon, Pompadour Green Pigeon, Emerald Dove, Blue Faced Malkoha, Ring Necked Parakeet, Sri Lankan Grey Hornbill, Malabar Pied Hornbill, House Crow, Stork Billed Kingfisher, Common Kingfisher, White Breasted Kingfisher, Little Green Bee eater, Chestnut Headed Bee eater, Hoopoe, Brown headed Barbet, Oriental Skylark, Grey Rumped Treeswift, Barn Swallow, Brown Shrike, Black Hooded Oriole, White Rumped Shama (a superb male when taking lunch), Indian Blue Robin, Oriental Magpie Robin, Indian Pitta, Yellow Billed Babbler, Plain Prinia, Asian Paradise Flycatcher & Common Myna.

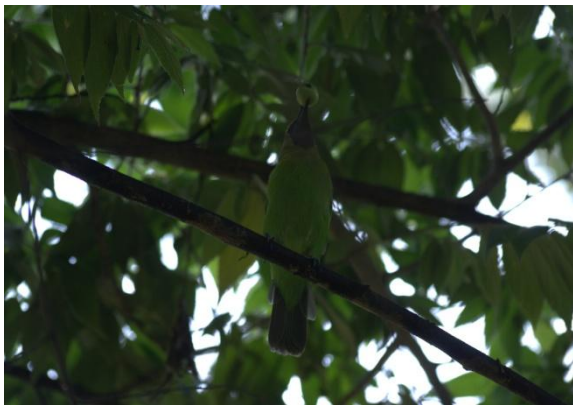
Thursday 24th October 2011

After yesterday's excursion we had a lazy final day around the hotel.

A canoe ride gave a Striated Heron and the usual Kingfishers and Egrets. After lunch we had a quick walk across the river and up the access road where a Black Rumped Flameback was seen before the day finished with another heavy downpour.

Friday 25th October 2011

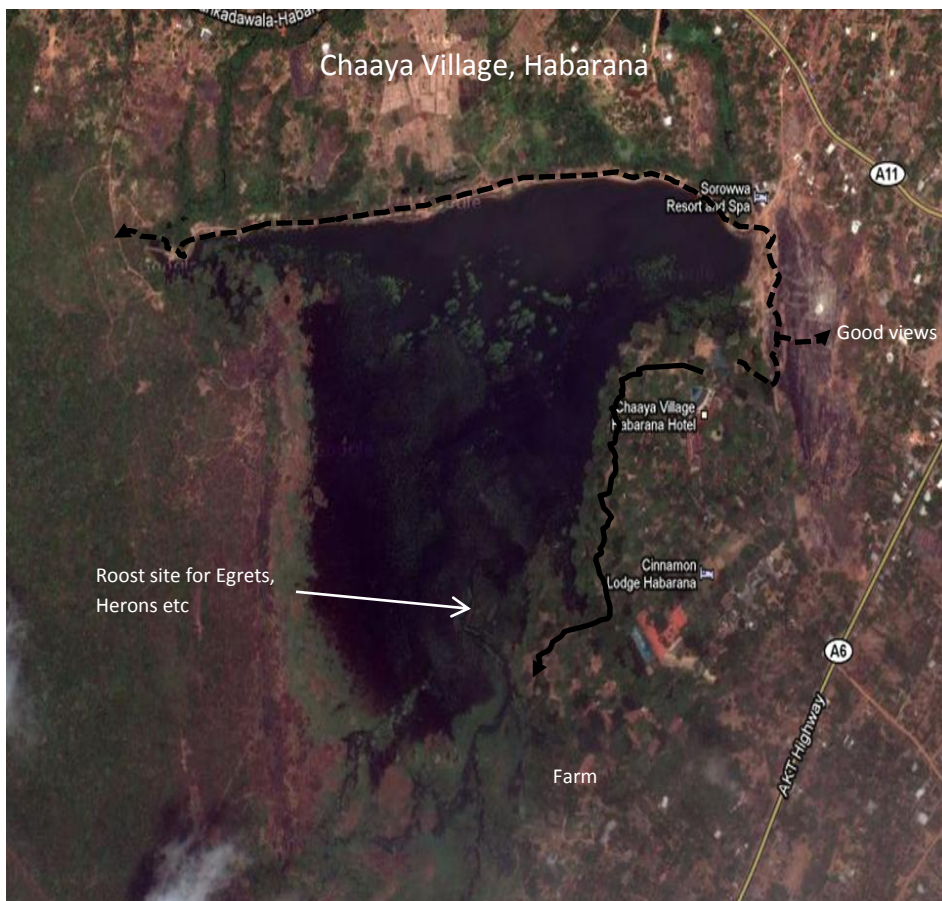
We flew home to a cold London Heathrow via Dubai.



Jerdon's Leafbird and Little Green Bee Eater at Chaaya Hotel, Painted Storks (juv) in Wilpattu NP, Yellow Bittern at Ranweli



Asian Paradise flycatcher, Oriental Magpie Robin, Black Hooded Oriole at Chaaya Hotel and Greater Thick Knee in Wilpattu NP.



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