

SRI LANKA

*DECEMBER 2 -18, 2012

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Sri Lanka is literally teeming with birds, including some twenty-six rather fancy endemics; a mass of Indian subcontinent endemics; and some marvelous mammals, reptiles, and butterflies. Its people welcome tourists with open arms, and now that this emerald isle is once again at peace, it is absolutely safe! Previous VENT tours to Sri Lanka have been such a resounding success that we now feel the time is ripe to yet again visit this birding mecca.

Although VENT's Sri Lanka tour will focus on the island specialties, we will also be treated to some of the most wonderful waterbird spectacles in Asia. Island specialties will include Sri Lanka Spurfowl, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Sri Lanka Hanging-Parrot, the spectacular and very elusive Red-faced Malkoha, Green-billed Coucal, Yellow-fronted Barbet, the handsome Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Spot-winged Thrush, White-faced Starling, and Brown-capped and Orange-billed babblers.

As for the waterbird spectacle, Bundala and Yala National Parks and surrounding tanks, located in the far southeast, are considered by many to be among the best birding areas in Asia. More than one hundred species are regularly recorded during a morning's walk/drive, including five species of storks; thousands of Palearctic shorebirds, which feed along the drying edge of the tanks (man-made lakes); large numbers of local Spot-billed Pelican; and a host of "bush-birds" such as Sirkeer Cuckoo and the uncommon Blue-faced Malkoha. We will also take time out to explore some of Sri Lanka's most important and "have to see" historical and cultural sites such as the extraordinary Lion Rock Fortress of Sigiriya.

This comprehensive VENT tour will take us from the globally important rainforests of Sinharaja to the high, wind-swept, moss-covered Rhododendron forests of the Horton Plains and the aptly named "World's End." Sinharaja Forest is Sri Lanka's last major remaining area of tropical wet lowland forest and the single most important site on the island. Here we will search for some of Sri Lanka's most elusive species including the Red-faced Malkoha.

We then have three days in the southeast to explore Bundala and Yala National Parks and investigate the avian and mammalian riches of this fabulous area before ascending into the central mountains. From our attractive rest house at Nuwara Eliya, we will search mountain forests and botanical gardens for the surprisingly elusive Arrenga, Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler, and Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, before heading farther north to the ancient centers of Kandy and Sigiriya where we will enjoy more birding amongst the stunningly beautiful ancient monuments of this fascinating country.

December 2-4, Days 1-3: Fly USA to Colombo, Sri Lanka. There are many choices for flights from the United States to Colombo, Sri Lanka. You should plan your flights to arrive Colombo Bandaranaike International Airport (airport code CMB) on or before December 4 where upon clearing customs and immigration, you will

* Please note the dates for this tour have changed since the publication of the 2012 VENT catalog.

be met by our ground agents and escorted to your hotel. We will meet as a group for the first time in the hotel lobby at 6:30 PM on December 4 for a brief orientation followed by dinner.

NIGHT (December 4): Cinnamon Lake Side Hotel, Colombo

December 5, Day 4: Drive to Hambantota. This morning we will make the long but fascinating drive down to the south-east of the island. Needless to say we will make regular stops along the way on what will inevitably be a fascinating journey.

NIGHT: Oasis Hotel, Hambantota

December 6, Day 5: Bundala National Park. This is a superb area absolutely teeming with birds. So this should be a very exciting day. One of the most important wetland areas in Asia, Sri Lanka's south-west "Dry Zone" is composed of a series of lagoons and saltpans separated from the Indian Ocean by a broad beach and fringing sand-dunes. Some of the species we may encounter include the endangered Spot-billed Pelican; Indian Cormorant; Little Cormorant; Black-crowned Night-Heron; Intermediate Egret; Painted Stork; Black-headed Ibis; thousands of Greater Flamingos – if they have arrived; Lesser Whistling-Duck; Booted Eagle; Great Thick-knee; Indian Stone-curler; Small and Oriental pratincoles; Greater Sand, Lesser Sand, Kentish, and Pacific Golden plovers; Marsh, Broad-billed, and Terek's sandpipers; Little and Temminck's stints; Brown-headed Gull; Caspian, Greater Crested, Lesser Crested, Little, and White-winged Black terns; Orange-breasted Pigeon; Pied Cuckoo; Blue-faced Malkoha; Blue-tailed Bee-eater; Indian Pitta; Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark; Jerdon's Bush-lark; Oriental Skylark; Paddyfield Pipit; and Brahminy Myna.

NIGHT: Oasis Hotel, Hambantota

December 7, Day 6: AM Bundala Area; PM Drive to Yala National Park. After lunch we will drive east and north to our very attractive hotel, located right at the edge of the huge Yala National Park.

NIGHT: Chaaya Wild Yala Hotel, Yala National Park

December 8, Day 7: Yala National Park. This reserve encompasses a large chunk of the south-east corner of Sri Lanka, including a magnificent mosaic of lowland habitats in a picturesque setting. This is an extremely rich area and we can expect to see large numbers of birds and mammals, many of which provide superb subjects for the photographers among us. It gets very hot during the middle of the day, so we will concentrate our efforts during the early morning and late afternoon. It is quite possible to see over one hundred species of birds in a morning, in addition to herds of Asian Elephants; Sambar; and Spotted, Barking, and, perhaps, Greater Mouse deer. This is also a superb reserve in which to see the magnificent Leopard and we will make every effort to locate this impressive cat. The park's extensive marshes also support huge numbers of ducks, herons, egrets, cormorants, and bitterns. Four species of storks regularly occur here: Black-necked, Lesser Adjutant, Woolly-necked, and Painted as well as the globally threatened Spot-billed Pelican. This will also be our best opportunity to see the endemic Sri Lanka Junglefowl. Other birds we may encounter include Crested Serpent-Eagle, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, Grey-headed Fish-Eagle, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Blue-faced Malkoha, Pied Kingfisher, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Sri Lankan Wood-Shrike, Asian Paradise-Flycatcher, Jungle Prinia, Hume's White-throat, and Black Redstart.

NIGHT: Chaaya Wild Yala Hotel, Yala National Park

December 9, Day 8: Drive from Yala to Udawalawe National Park. This morning we will depart for Embilipitiya, which we will use as a base to visit the Udawalawe National Park. *En route* we will keep an eye out for a host of interesting waders and waterbirds which may be found on the many tanks that dot the countryside. In Uda Walawe we are sure to encounter wild Elephants as well as some of the dry country birds such as Crested Hawk-Eagle, possibly Short-toed Eagle, possibly Painted Francolin and the elusive Rain Quail, Barred Buttonquail, Sirkeer Malkoha, Pied Cuckoo, Tawny-bellied Babbler and Brahminy Starling.

NIGHT: Centuria Hotel, Embilipitiya

December 10, Day 9: Morning Uda Walawe; Afternoon drive to Sinharaja Forest. After some final birding in Uda Walawe we will make the longish drive to Sinharaja Forest. Unlike previous tours, we can now stay at a very attractive small hotel located right on the edge of this wonderful forest and thus avoid the horrendously long drive we used to have to endure.

NIGHT: Blue Magpie Lodge, Sinharaja

December 11-12, Days 10-11: Sinharaja Forest. Sinharaja World Heritage Site is a superb tract of rainforest encompassing some 10,000 hectares and about 20 years ago thanks to some herculean conservation efforts was largely saved from large-scale logging. Sinharaja is the last area of rainforest of any size left in Sri Lanka and today is a National Heritage Wilderness area under the administration of the Forest Department, as well as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We have two full days in which to explore these superb forests which include more than 125 endemic species of trees as well as a large number of Sri Lanka's endemic birds, in addition to some of the nation's most exciting and elusive species.

We should be particularly alert to the presence of mixed species feeding flocks, which invariably include a large number of specialties. Birds we might see include Malay Night-Heron (rare), Besra, Rufous-bellied Hawk-Eagle, Sri Lankan Spurfowl (this handsome endemic is extremely elusive, but listen for it scratching on the forest floor), Sri Lanka Green-Pigeon, Sri Lankan Hanging-Parrot, Layard's Parakeet, Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, the splendid Chestnut-backed Owlet, Brown Hawk-Owl, Red-faced Malkoha (perhaps the most beautiful of all malkohas and one of the most sought-after of all Sri Lanka's endemic birds), Green-billed Coucal, Sri Lankan Frogmouth, Indian Swiftlet, Brown Needletail, Malabar Trogon, Oriental Dwarf-Kingfisher, Sri Lankan Grey and Malabar Pied hornbills, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Lesser Yellownappe, Yellow-fronted and Sri Lankan Small barbets, Square-tailed Black and Black-capped bulbuls, White-faced Starling, White-bellied Drongo, Sri Lankan and Southern Hill mynas, Sri Lankan Blue Magpie (a very striking looking and sounding endemic), Spot-winged Thrush, Sri Lankan Scimitar-Babbler, Dark-fronted and Yellow-billed babblers, Ashy-headed Laughingthrush, Large-billed and Green warblers, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Legge's Flowerpecker, and Loten's Sunbird. With a bit of luck we may also find the frustratingly elusive Sri Lankan Spurfowl and increasingly rare White-faced Starling. If we are extremely lucky we may even come across the rare and poorly-known Sri Lanka Bay Owl (split from Oriental Bay), a species restricted to Sri Lanka and southern India. Mammals are not conspicuous but we should see troops of endemic Purple-faced Leaf Monkeys moving through the canopy and we may also encounter the impressive Sri Lanka Giant Squirrel.

NIGHTS: Blue Magpie Lodge, Sinharaja

December 13, Day 12: Drive to Nuwara Eliya. As we climb steadily through the dramatic scenery of the Sri Lanka highlands we will bird *en route* making a number of stops to look for any species we may have missed, such as the increasingly rare Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Brown Wood-Owl, and Streak-throated Woodpecker. We should arrive at our hotel in time for some late-afternoon birding. The delightfully cool, old colonial hill station of Nuwara Eliya is surrounded by beautiful mature forest and will be our base for the next two nights as we search for Sri Lanka's high elevation species, at about 6700 feet elevation. During the afternoon we will visit centrally located Victoria Park, one of the best spots in Sri Lanka to see the superb Indian Pitta; Pied Thrush; the very attractive, endemic Yellow-eared Bulbul; Kashmir Flycatcher; Sri Lanka White-eye; Loten's Sunbird; and Indian Blue Robin. The immaculate Pied Thrush regularly forages on the lawns late in the afternoon after the daily crowds have wended their way home.

NIGHT: The Grand Hotel, Nuwara Eliya

December 14, Days 13: Nuwara Eliya. We will also enjoy another highlight of the tour – a full day trip of the Horton Plains National Park in the heart of Sri Lanka's spectacular mountain ranges. A number of fascinating bird species are restricted to this montane area including Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler, Dull Blue Flycatcher and the much sought-after and most rarely seen endemic Sri Lanka Whistling-Thrush. However, we should at all times be prepared for rain as we have entered Sri Lanka's "Wet Zone," where damp mist and cloud often swirl back and forth across the surrounding crags.

Later in the day we will visit the Hakgala Botanical Gardens. Established in 1861, these gardens boast some impressive specimens of trees and shrubs, as well as a number of interesting birds. Species we may see include Besra Sparrowhawk; Mountain Hawk-Eagle; Indian Swiftlet; Yellow-eared Bulbul; Sri Lanka Blue Magpie (occasionally nests here); the rare Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon; Sri Lanka Bush-Warbler; Kashmir and Dusky-Blue flycatchers; and Sri Lanka White-eye and Black-throated Munia.

NIGHT: The Grand Hotel, Nuwara Eliya

December 15, Day 14: Drive to Kandy. A slightly more leisurely start today will see us on our way to the delightful city of Kandy where we will make a visit to the Royal Botanic Gardens at nearby Peradeniya. Some excellent birds can be seen in this pleasant setting including Alexandrine and Blossom-headed parakeets, Large Cuckoo-shrike and Sri Lankan Small Barbet. In the afternoon we will visit the legendary Temple of the Tooth, one of Buddhism's most important monuments.

NIGHT: Earl's Regency, Kandy

December 16, Day 15: Drive to Sigiriya. On our way to Sigiriya, we will stop at Udawatte Kelle Sanctuary where we may encounter Yellow-fronted Barbets, the diminutive Oriental Dwarf-Kingfisher, Brown-capped Babbler or Emerald Doves. Arriving at Sigiriya in the afternoon will allow us time to enjoy yet more wonderful birding in a superb setting. This evening we will make a special effort to track down Jerdon's Nightjar.

NIGHT: Hotel Sigiriya, Sigiriya

December 17, Day 16: Sigiriya. The town of Sigiriya is centered around the incredible Lion Rock Fortress built by Prince Kasyapa over 1500 years ago. We will explore this truly amazing monument as well as bird the adjacent and equally ancient gardens and tanks. Some of the birds we will look out for include Drongo Cuckoo, Blue Rock Thrush and the simply gorgeous Orange-headed Thrush. This brings our tour of this magnificent island to an end as we proceed again to Colombo where we will overnight before our flight either tomorrow or in the early hours of the morning.

NIGHT: Cinnamon Lake Side Hotel, Colombo

December 18, Day 17: International Flights Home. Participants should schedule flights home to depart Colombo (CMB) any time today. Check-out time from the hotel is 12:00 PM.

EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS: Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

MEDICAL EVACUATION INSURANCE REQUIREMENT: All participants are **required** to purchase a medical evacuation policy for this tour and will be asked to sign and return to the VENT office a waiver stating that this has been done. Such a policy should be available from any insurance company which provides trip cancellation coverage (see below).

TOUR SIZE: This tour will be limited to 10 participants.

TOUR LEADERS: David Bishop and a local guide

David Bishop loves his vocation and cannot imagine anything better than exploring wild and beautiful places in Asia and the Pacific in the company of friends and clients. He has spent much of the past 35 years studying the birds and natural history of the Oriental region, in addition to New Guinea, the Southwest Pacific, and most recently Central Asia. David was once a police officer amid the streets of London's West End, but has emerged as an acknowledged authority on the birds of these exotic regions. His enthusiasm for these places and their

birds is contagious. This, along with his skills in locating wildlife, sharing what he sees with others, and conversing with local people in their native language, ensures you the very finest quality tour. David has undertaken a number of expeditions to survey the birds and other wildlife of previously unexplored regions throughout New Guinea (largely together with Jared Diamond) and the Oriental Region. This has resulted in a number of exciting discoveries and rediscoveries including the incomparable Wallace's Standardwing, a bizarre bird-of-paradise. Some of the results of this work, together with observations gained during the VENT tours he leads, have been published in the scientific and semi-popular literature to which David is a regular contributor. In July 1997, David, together with Brian Coates, published *A Guide to the Birds of Wallacea (Sulawesi, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sundas)*, and David is currently working on other book projects. David lives with his wife and daughter (his son currently resides in England), a koala or two, and a mob of kangaroos on a lovely wooded property on the outskirts of the university town of Armidale, NSW, Australia. David is an avid photographer and his images can increasingly be seen in the pages of wildlife publications.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS: The fee for the tour is **\$5495** per person in double occupancy from Colombo, Sri Lanka. This includes all meals from Dinner on Day 3 to Dinner on Day 16, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation, gratuities and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Colombo and return, airport departure taxes, visa fees, alcoholic beverages other than those supplied as part of the meal, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature. Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration, a small-party supplement may have to be charged.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$1125**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES: In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES: In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$500** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Cancellation penalties and refunds are based on the following schedule: if cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, a cancellation fee of **\$250** per person will be charged unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be **\$100** per person. If cancellation is made fewer than 120 days before departure date, no refund is available. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions. *We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.*

<u>If you cancel:</u>	<u>Your refund will be:</u>
120 days or more before departure date	Your deposit minus \$250*
Fewer than 120 days before departure date	No refund available

*Unless the deposit is transferred to a new registration for another VENT tour that will operate within the next 12 months, in which case the cancellation fee will be \$100 per person.

TRIP INSURANCE: A brochure and application form regarding optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. **We strongly recommend that you purchase trip cancellation insurance as soon as possible to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness.** VENT recommends *Travel Insured International* as our preferred insurance provider. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions is available however stipulations apply usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering.** Optional expanded insurance coverage is available and includes items such as work-related cancellation, medical upgrade, and a “Cancel for Any Reason” clause among others. Contact *Travel Insured International* prior to registration for details. Not all insurance providers provide the same levels of coverage. If you purchase insurance through a company other than *Travel Insured International*, please be advised that rules and stipulations may be different.

MEDICAL INSURANCE WHICH COVERS YOU FOR EMERGENCY EVACUATION/REPATRIATION DURING THE TRIP IS REQUIRED FOR THIS TOUR. This coverage is included in the Worldwide Trip Protector plan offered by *Travel Insured International*. If you do not choose to purchase the insurance through *Travel Insured International*, you will need to do so through another insurance provider. A good website for information and acquisition of emergency evacuation/repatriation insurance is: www.insuremytrip.com.

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.

AIR INFORMATION: Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

CLIMATE: The VENT tour is arranged at a time when the weather is not especially hot or humid and in general the climate will be very pleasant. It is a little drier and hotter in and around Bundala and Yala National Parks and quite cool around dawn and dusk at higher altitudes around Nuwara Eliya and especially in Horton Plains National Park. It may even be cold for the first few hours, around dawn on some of our early morning excursions. We may encounter some rain, but it is unlikely.

CLOTHING: For all VENT tours to Sri Lanka, bring lightweight long-sleeved shirts and pants in natural fabric such as cotton or cotton and man-made fiber blends, or even better the new loose-fitting nylon field shirts and pants that are produced in ideal colors, such as those by Columbia and Exofficio. These offer protection against the sun and insects (very few), while remaining comfortable, cool and easy to launder. A warm sweater or jacket is essential for the cool dawns and evenings. People who feel the cold easily may require additional protection. Robust walking boots with good lug soles are essential; lightweight sports sneakers are generally insufficient. Thick socks help absorb perspiration and cushion one's feet, especially when walking constantly on a hard surface. A sound rainproof jacket and plastic pants are also recommended.

All clothing should be in DULL muted colors as this is less disturbing to birds and other wildlife. **PLEASE no bright colors and that includes pale khaki.** A wide-brimmed hat is also very important. Sunglasses can also be useful for reducing glare and keeping dust out of one's eyes during rides in open vehicles. Clients may like to include one dressier outfit (such as a sports coat, dress or pantsuit) for wearing to dinner at some of the smarter hotels and/or lodges.

CURRENCY: The currency of Sri Lanka is Sri Lankan Rupee. Travelers Cheques and foreign currency can be exchanged at various commercial banks and hotels. Banks may charge a 0.5% handling fee and a commission, which varies from bank to bank. The use and acceptance of MasterCard and Visa are widely accepted, while American Express has limited acceptance. While visiting remote areas it is advisable to arrange for an alternative mode of payment apart from credit card.

DOCUMENTS: A current passport valid for at least six months after the conclusion of the tour and your return airline ticket are required for entry into Sri Lanka. A visa is also required for travel to Sri Lanka for tourism with a stay under 30 days. An "Electronic Travel Authorization - ETA" is now in place to grant prior approval for your visa and can be obtained online for foreign nationals through the Sri Lanka Department of Immigration and Emigration at www.eta.gov.lk. Be advised that getting the prior approval with the ETA is not a visa but an approval to enter Sri Lanka. The visa itself will be stamped in the passport on arrival. A fee of US \$50 will be charged for a tourist visa with double entry for 30 days. It is important to indicate that your reason to visit is "natural history tourism" rather than specifically birdwatching. If you indicate specifically "birdwatching", they may think the expedition is scientific and require a business visa.

HEALTH: If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

Although no vaccinations are required, as standard travel precautions you should be up to date with tetanus shots and current on your yellow fever protection, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B. Malaria is present in some parts of the Indian sub-continent, including Sri Lanka. There have been some recent changes in recommendations for malaria prophylaxis. Mefloquine (Lariam) is recommended for chloroquine-resistant malaria as well as the newer Malarone which has fewer side effects. Both are available by prescription only and may not be suitable for those using cardio-vascular medication; consult your physician.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta Georgia. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636), or you can check their website at www.cdc.gov/travel. Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html (click on travel health).

Sanitation is not ideal however it has improved radically during the time that VENT has been operating tours to Sri Lanka, largely as a result of greatly improved hygiene and the widespread availability of bottled, non-carbonated water. Clients are advised **NOT** to drink the water anywhere, even in the very smart hotels of the larger cities. Indian and Sri Lankan beer is excellent and tea and coffee and other bottled soft drinks are safe and widely available. Bottled water is also widely available, and this is perhaps one of the most important contributions to the reduction in sickness on tours to the Indian sub-continent.

Clients are advised **NOT** to eat uncooked or partially cooked meat or vegetables or food that has been cooling in the open permitting flies to settle. Only eat fruit that you have peeled, preferably first washing the outside with clean water. **"BOIL IT, PEEL IT OR FORGET IT."** Traveler's diarrhea used to be a common complaint on trips to the Indian sub-continent. Fortunately, this increasingly is now uncommon and usually only as a result of the incautious eating of some of India's wonderfully spicy food! A prescription of Lomotol, to take care of the symptoms, is useful to have along.

Insects are generally not a problem at the time of VENT tours to Sri Lanka; however, mosquitoes can be an occasional nuisance. We recommend carrying Cutter's or similar insect repellent.

EQUIPMENT: Of course a good pair of binoculars in sound condition (please check) are essential. Some clients carry a second pair in case of emergency. The same advice applies to people who wear eye glasses or contact lenses to protect against accident or theft. Your tour leader will be carrying a Swarovski spotting scope; however, you are more than welcome (**in fact encouraged**) to bring your own spotting scope if you so wish.

Clients are strongly advised to check that all their equipment is in good working order, that they have new and plenty of spare batteries for all their flash units, etc., and that they are carrying more than enough film or digital storage units.

Other items of use include a flashlight (torch), water bottle or canteen, a small daypack, plastic bags to protect your equipment, handywipes, and paper tissues and industrial masks (very useful in dusty, sandy locations such as the dry habitats).

MISC:

Electricity – The electric current in Sri Lanka is 230-240V, 50 cycles, alternating current. Since voltage tends to fluctuate quite often in Sri Lanka, it is safer to bring a stabilizer if you are going to be using sensitive electronic equipment. Two and three pin round plugs are widely used.

Language – Sinhala (also called Sinhalese or Singhalese) is the mother tongue of the Sinhalese ethnic group which is the largest in Sri Lanka.

Time – 10½ hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time

SUGGESTED READING: Our website, www.ventbird.com offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from this store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as www.amazon.com, and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, www.abebooks.com or www.buteobooks.com which specializes in ornithology books.

This is the most important book to have on this trip:

Grimmet, Richard, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. *Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Helm Identification Guides. Christopher Helm & A.C. Black. London. 2002. This book illustrates and documents in detail every species we are likely to encounter on any tour to the Indian subcontinent. All participants are recommended to obtain a copy of this guide as it greatly supersedes all previous guides we have advocated for tours to this region. This excellent guide covers all the species of India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Andaman Islands and Sri Lanka.

Other good guides to the birds of India include:

Kazmierczak, K. & B. van Perlo. *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Robertsbridge. PicaPress. 1999. This is a very nice alternative to the Rasmussen & Anderton 2005 or the Grimmet *et al* guide.

Rasmussen, P. C. & J. C. Anderton. 2005. *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide. Vols. 1 and 2*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Editions. Washington D.C. and Barcelona. If you want something more detailed and comprehensive than the Grimmet *et al* book, then you should also obtain the Rasmussen book. This book also has a much more up to date taxonomy.

For general background books on India, we recommend:

Beebe, W. *Pheasant Jungles*. Reading. World Pheasant Association. 1994.

Bole, P.V. & Y. Vaghani. *Field Guide to the Common Trees of India*. Bombay. WWF India/OUP. 1986.

Daniel, J.C. *The Book of Indian Reptile and Amphibians*. Bombay: Bombay Natural History Society, 2002.

Ellis, R. *Sri Lanka*. Bradt Travel Guides. 2011.

Gee, E.P. *The Wildlife of India*. London. Collins. 1964.

Gurung, K.K. and Raj Singh. *Field Guide to the Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent: Where to watch Mammals in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Pakistan*. San Diego: Academic Press, 1996.

Harrison, J. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka*. OUP. 1999

Hawkins, R. E. *Encyclopedia of Indian Natural History*. Oxford University Press. 1987.

Kazmierczak, Krys and Raj Singh. *A Birdwatchers' Guide to India*. Bedfordshire, United Kingdom: Prion Ltd., 1998. This book describes a cross-section of birding sites covering all of India's regions and main habitats, and is very informative. It's a wonderful and fascinating book co-authored by Raj Singh, co-author of *Mammals of the Indian Subcontinent*, and owner of the company handling our ground arrangements in India, Assam, and Bhutan. Currently, it is not available in the USA; however, it is available through Natural History Book Service, 2 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 5XN U.K., phone 011-44-1803865913 or fax 011-44-1803865280.

McNeely, Jeffrey A. and Paul Spencer Wachtel. *Soul of the Tiger: Searching for Natural Answers in Southeast Asia*. New York: Doubleday, 1988. One of the most intriguing and beautifully written books on the complex relationships between man, his myriad beliefs and nature and the implications for conservation.

Menon, V. *A Field Guide to Indian Mammals*. DK Delhi. 2003. Undoubtedly the very finest field guide to the mammals of India.

Prater, S. H. *The Book of Indian Animals*. Oxford University Press, 1993. Try looking at www.abebooks.com.

Whittaker, R. and A. Captain. *Snakes of India. The Fields Guide*. Draco Books, Chennai, India. 2004.

Wijeyeratne, De Silva G. *Sri Lanka Wildlife*. Bradt Wildlife Guides. 2007.

TIPPING: Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

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