ROCKJUMPER

Worldwide Birding Adventures

Sri Lanka

Endemic Birds & Big Game

22nd November to 2nd December 2023 (11 days)



Serendib Scops Owl by Adam Riley

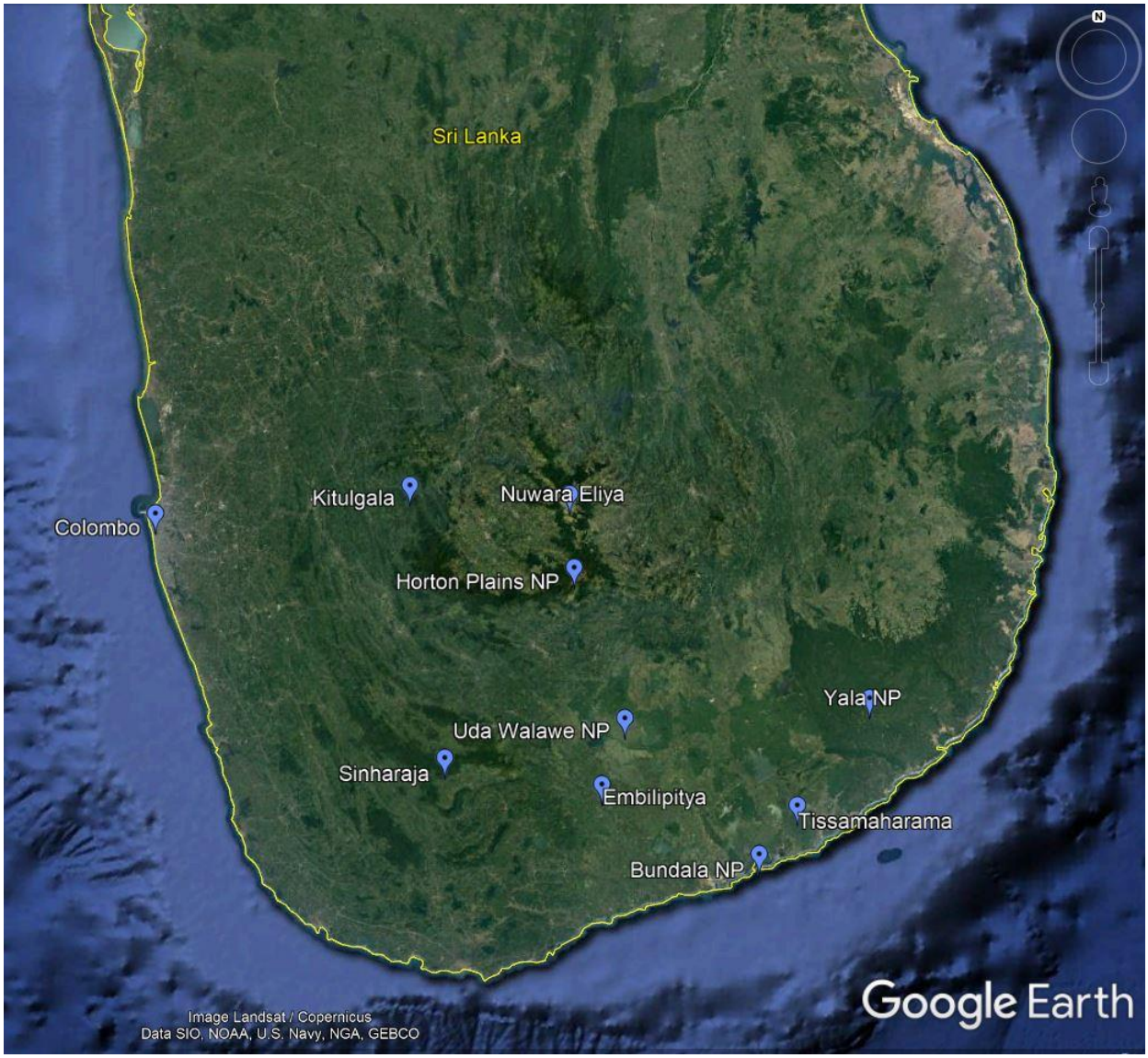
Sri Lanka is a friendly island nation boasting verdant scenery, characterised by terraced tea plantations and forest patches, and blessed with many surprisingly large national parks brimming with game and birds. These attractions, coupled with a fascinating history and vibrant culture, make this a truly exotic destination and a pleasure to explore. From the central highlands to the rich lowland rainforests, Sri Lanka is one of only a handful of magical destinations where it is possible to see every single country endemic in a well-planned trip such as this, making this extension a 'must' for the keen birder!

THE TOUR AT A GLANCE…

THE ITINERARY

Day 1	**Colombo and transfer to Kitulgala**
Day 2	**Kitulgala Rainforest**
Day 3	**Kitulgala to Nuwara Eliya**
Day 4	**Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains**
Day 5	**Nuwara Eliya to Yala via Tissamaharama**
Day 6	**Yala National Park**
Day 7	**Yala to Embilipitiya and Uda Walawe NP via Bundala NP**
Day 8	**Embilipitiya to Sinharaja Rainforest**
Days 9 & 10	**Sinharaja Rainforest**
Day 11	**Sinharaja to Colombo**

TOUR ROUTE MAP…



THE TOUR IN DETAIL…



Layard's Parakeet by Markus Lilje

Day 1: Colombo and transfer to Kitulgala. We begin our adventure in Colombo, the capital city of Sri Lanka. From here we journey on paved roads through local towns and rubber plantations to the Kelani River Forest Reserve. Occasional stops en route could produce White-throated Kingfisher, Indian Swiftlet, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Greater Coucal, Crested Serpent Eagle and Indian Pond Heron.

Our lodge here is perched on the edge of the scenic and peaceful Kelani River, the location where the classic "Bridge over the River Kwai" was filmed. Garden birds include Green Imperial Pigeon, flocks of Sri Lanka Hanging Parrots feeding in the flowering trees, Yellow-fronted Barbet, the impressive Stork-billed Kingfisher, White-rumped Munia, Orange Minivet, Golden-fronted Leafbird, Yellow-billed Babbler, Oriental Magpie Robin, Pale-billed Flowerpecker, Square-tailed Bulbul, and Purple-rumped and Loten's Sunbirds.

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Day 2: Kitulgala Rainforest. We will awake this morning to the pleasant sounds of the surrounding tropical forest. After breakfast, we will then cross the Kelani River in dugout canoes and spend time walking in the surrounding lowland tropical rainforest in search of the diurnal Chestnut-backed Owlet, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Alexandrine and Layard's Parakeets, the shy Green-billed Coucal, Brown-capped and noisy flocks of Orange-billed Babblers, Brown-breasted Flycatcher, Legge's Flowerpecker and Spot-winged Thrush. The stunning Sri Lanka Blue Magpie gives itself away by its striking call and may be found feeding at eye-level, sometimes allowing very close approach and excellent photographic opportunities. Other scarce inhabitants include Sri Lanka Spurfowl and Red-faced Malkoha, but we will count ourselves lucky to see either of these two species at Kitulgala and are much better sought at Sinharaja later in the trip.

Brahminy Kite, Crested Honey Buzzard, Crested Serpent Eagle and Black Eagle may be viewed soaring over the surrounding forest, while large numbers of swifts can sometimes be seen skimming the river. These include Indian Swiftlet, Asian Palm Swift and the huge Brown-backed Needletail. The enigmatic Serendib Scops Owl, discovered as recently as 2004, also occurs here, and we will try hard to find this elusive endemic. The near-endemic and highly elusive Sri Lanka Bay Owl also occurs in the forest-proper and we



Sri Lanka Junglefowl by Markus Lilje

might be fortunate enough to encounter this rarity during our time in the area.



Sri Lanka Blue Magpie by Markus Lilje

After lunch back at our accommodations, we'll bird the more open, secondary forest where the birding is easier and more rewarding than the forest interior. Although a few of the rarer and more secretive species are absent from the open, secondary forest, the habitat does support most of the area's specialties and endemics and the birds that do occur here do so in much higher densities than in the forest interior. In this habitat we'll keep a lookout for noteworthy species such as Southern and Sri Lanka Hill Mynas, Sri Lanka Grey Hornbill, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon, the low-density Crimson-fronted Barbet, wintering Indian Pitta, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Yellow-browed and Black-capped Bulbuls, Plum-faced Parakeet, Black-hooded Oriole and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher. Crested Goshawk, Shikra and Banded Bay Cuckoo are also often seen here and there's even a chance of finding one of the island's rarer species such as White-faced Starling, Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, the quite distinctive and endemic subspecies of Common Hawk-Cuckoo or Slaty-legged Crake.

Day 3: Kitulgala to Nuwara Eliya. Today we will journey southwards, ascending into the cooler highlands of central Sri Lanka after some final, early morning birding around Kitulgala. We should have time after lunch to visit a quiet side-road near the edge of Nuwara Eliya town where a selection of localised endemics, restricted to these higher elevations, can be found. Targets include the extremely low-density Legge's Hawk-Eagle soaring overhead, mixed species flocks with Sri Lanka White-eye, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Green and Large-billed Leaf Warblers, Orange Minivet, Yellow-eared Bulbul, Dull-blue Flycatcher, Cinereous Tit and Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher and the skulking Sri Lanka Bush Warbler in the undergrowth. We will then continue on to our Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush site where a late afternoon/dusk vigil will hopefully produce a sighting of this rare and secretive endemic before arriving at our comfortable hotel in Nuwara Eliya.



Yellow-eared Bulbul by Markus Lilje

Day 4: Nuwara Eliya and Horton Plains. The surrounding highlands of Nuwara Eliya are home to an exciting variety of species and this morning we will be up bright and early in order to make the most of our time in the area. Our port of call for today is the stunning Horton Plains National Park, where we will be in search of one of Sri Lanka's most endangered and secretive endemics, the Sri Lanka Whistling Thrush, should we not have already seen it yesterday evening. This highly prized endemic, which inhabits the fringes of high-altitude forested pools, is tricky to pin down and we will be happy with any sighting of this



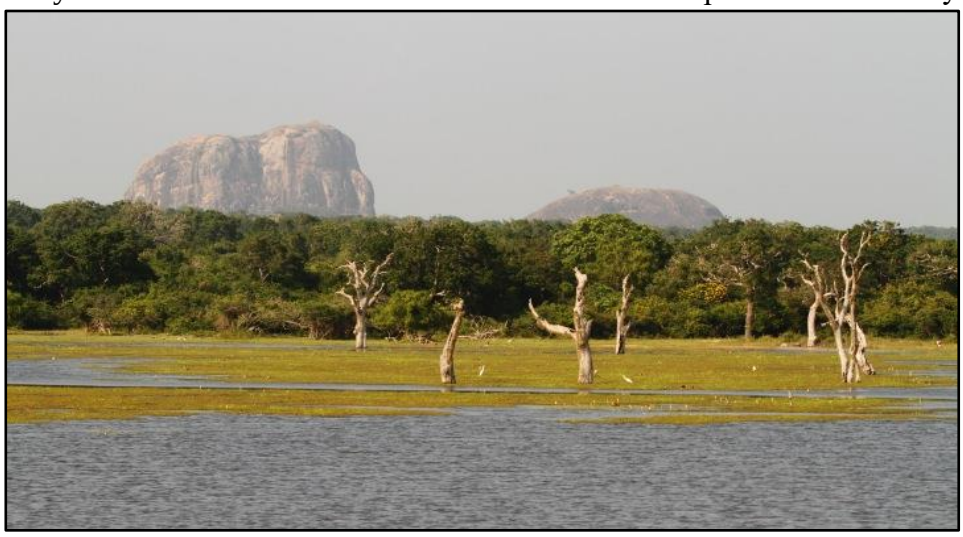
Blue-faced Malkoha by Adam Riley

enigmatic species. Other exciting specialities of this stunted and twisted forest include Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon, Crimson-backed Flameback, Indian Blackbird, the reclusive Sri Lanka Bush Warbler, the stunning and localised Kashmir Flycatcher, here at its winter quarters and often associating with mixed flocks, the endemic Dull-blue Flycatcher, Sri Lanka White-eye, the flashy Indian Blue Robin, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, the stunning Yellow-eared Bulbul and possibly Legge's (Mountain) Hawk-Eagle. In the grassland areas we'll likely encounter the near-endemic Hill Swallow, as well as Pied Bush Chat and flocks of Munias that could include Tricolored, White-rumped and the rare and range-restricted Black-throated.

In the late morning, we will return to the lodge for lunch and will then pass the remainder of the day in Victoria Park. Here we will search the gardens and thickets along the stream for the secretive Indian Pitta and shy Pied Thrush, both on their wintering grounds. Other noteworthy specials include Forest Wagtail, Greenish Warbler, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Kashmir Flycatcher and if we are very lucky, the secretive Slaty-legged Crake or endemic Sri Lanka Thrush.

Day 5: Nuwara Eliya to Yala via Tissamaharama. This morning we have another chance to visit Victoria Park should we have missed any of the target species there the previous afternoon. After breakfast, we will then depart the highlands and make our way south into the lowlands of Sri Lanka. En route we'll stop in at the Surrey Bird Sanctuary where a Brown Wood Owl has been roosting the past few years. Other species of interest that we may find here while searching for the owl include Red-backed Flameback, Southern Hill Myna, Yellow-fronted and Brown-headed Barbets, Orange Minivet, Tickell's Blue and Dull-blue Flycatchers, White-browed Bulbul and Sri Lanka Wood Pigeon.

The afternoon will be spent visiting the wetlands and woodlands surrounding Tissamaharama (Tissa), home to an amazing variety of water-associated birds. Water-associated species we'll likely encounter include Spot-billed Pelican, Little and Indian Cormorants, Oriental Darter - often seen sunning itself on dead snags, Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Black-headed Ibis, Yellow Bittern in the thick reeds, Lesser Whistling Duck, the spectacular Pheasant-tailed Jacana in open areas of lily-covered wetland, and, if we are



Yala scenery by Glen Valentine



Leopard by Glen Valentine

fortunate, the endangered Lesser Adjutant, Cotton Pygmy Goose, Greater Flamingo or the secretive Black Bittern. We'll also visit several potential day roosts for various owl species that could include the impressive Brown Fish Owl, Indian Scops Owl, miniscule Jungle Owlet and Eastern Barn Owl. In the late afternoon we'll stake out an area of coconut palms where we hope to find a pair of the scarce White-naped Woodpecker before settling into our lovely accommodations close to Yala NP.

Day 6: Yala National Park. Today we will board open safari jeeps for a full day of game viewing and birding in the fabulous Yala National Park. This wonderful reserve supports superb mammals, including healthy numbers of Asian Elephant, Water Buffalo, Sambar, Spotted Deer, sounders of Wild Boar, Golden Jackal, Stripe-necked and Ruddy Mongoose, Tufted Grey Langur, Toque Macaque, Indian Hare and even Leopard! In fact, Yala claims the highest density of Leopard of any site in the world and is one of the very best places in Asia to see this elusive feline. If we extremely fortunate we may even encounter a Sloth Bear, which is encountered fairly regularly in the Reserve but would require a fair amount of luck.

Birding the woodlands of Yala should prove rewarding and we will search for the rare White-naped Woodpecker, the unobtrusive Sirkeer and Blue-faced Malkohas, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker, Jerdon's Bush Lark, White-browed Bulbul, Marshall's Iora, Black-headed Cuckooshrike, Barred Buttonquail, White-browed Fantail, Jerdon's Leafbird, Indian Paradise Flycatcher, Blyth's Pipit and Streaked Weaver. Other interesting species we'll likely encounter include the handsome Brahminy Starling, Sri Lanka Junglefowl, Orange-breasted Green Pigeon, Chestnut-headed, Blue-tailed and Asian Green Bee-eaters, Grey-bellied and Jacobin Cuckoos, Great Stone-curlew, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Yellow-eyed Babbler and Baya Weaver. Indian Peafowl are common in the park and we'll almost certainly find several males in full display, one of nature's greatest and most spectacular events!



Asian Green Bee-eater by Markus Lilje

Wetlands and coastal areas literally teem with birds, including the oversized Great Thick-knee, Little Ringed, Kentish and Pacific Golden Plovers, a variety of other migratory waders, Painted Stork, Lesser Adjutant and the incomparable but scarce and erratic Black-necked Stork.

Day 7: Yala to Embilipitiya and Uda Walawe NP via Bundala NP. Departing early this morning we will



Sri Lanka Frogmouth by Markus Lilje

continue our way westward to our accommodation in Embilipitiya. Most of the morning will be spent at the extensive coastal wetlands and saltpans of Bundala National Park, giving us a chance for more coastal species such as the impressive White-bellied Sea Eagle, Whimbrel, Curlew Sandpiper, congregations of Black-tailed Godwit, Little Stint, the uncommon Small and Oriental Pratincoles, Caspian, Greater Crested, Lesser Crested, Little, White-winged, Whiskered and Gull-billed Terns. Scarcer waders include Great Knot, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Common Ringed Plover, and Red-necked and Temminck's Stints. Scanning carefully around the numerous pans and reedbeds in this area may produce Black, Cinnamon and Yellow Bitterns, Yellow-wattled Lapwing, Watercock, Pin-tailed and Greater Painted-snipe, while wintering Blyth's Pipit may be found in open fields of shorter grass and Indian Stone-curlews are often located roosting under dense, scrubby bushes.

In the afternoon we will visit the sanctuary of Uda Walawe National Park. This extensive reserve of open grassland and scattered woodland is home to over three-hundred Asian Elephants and some scarce bird species, including the impressive and localised Malabar Pied Hornbill, near-endemic Blue-faced Malkoha, Sirkeer Malkoha and Grey-headed Fish Eagle. Barred Buttonquail sometimes makes an appearance at the road-edge and we also hope to find Jungle, Ashy and Grey-breasted Prinias, flocks of migratory Rosy Starling, Changeable Hawk-Eagle and the spectacular Indian Roller. This is also the best area in Sri Lanka to observe the uncommon Jungle Cat! After a full afternoon enjoying the splendours of this Reserve, we will settle into our nearby accommodations for the night.

Day 8: Embilipitiya to Sinharaja Rainforest. We depart Embilipitiya for the Sinharaja Rainforest, well known among birders for hosting the widest variety of forest-associated birds in Sri Lanka. The Sinharaja Forest was selectively logged more than twenty years ago but has recovered well since its protection and is now the largest area of lowland rainforest in all of Sri Lanka and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We have the late afternoon to begin birding the area around our lodge. The birding here at the forest edge and "farm bush"/secondary forest habitat can be excellent and noteworthy species we might encounter include Layard's and Plum-headed Parakeets, Yellow-fronted and Crimson-fronted Barbets, Crested Treeswift, Sri Lanka Hill and Southern Hill Mynas, Indian Paradise



Green-billed Coucal by Glen Valentine



Sri Lanka Spurfowl by Glen Valentine

Flycatcher, Orange Minivet, Red-backed Flameback, Sri Lanka Swallow, Asian Brown Flycatcher, Scaly-breasted, White-rumped and the rare and elusive Black-throated Munias, Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, White-browed, Square-tailed and Yellow-browed Bulbuls, Sri Lanka Green Pigeon and the scarce and endemic Green-billed Coucal.

Days 9 & 10: Sinharaja Rainforest.
Some of the special birds we will be looking for during our time in this extensive forest include Brown-capped, Dark-fronted and Orange-billed Babblers, the very secretive Sri Lanka Spurfowl – usually tracked down by its call, Layard's Parakeet screeching overhead, the migratory Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, Green-billed Coucal, Large-billed Leaf Warbler, the scarce Red-faced Malkoha, striking Malabar Trogon – often perched motionless high overhead, Spot-winged and shy Sri Lanka Thrushes and flocks of Ashy-headed Laughingthrush

Forest clearings will afford us views of the canopy and it is here where we will scan for the scarce and very localised White-faced Starling, while watching the forest fringes we will keep our eyes peeled for Sri Lanka Hill Myna, the magnificent Sri Lanka Blue Magpie, Sri Lanka Drongo, Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler, Legge's Flowerpecker, Brown-backed Needletail flying overhead and Black-capped Bulbul. Possible mammals include Grizzled Giant Squirrel, Purple-faced Leaf Monkey and Layard's Striped Squirrel.

Sinharaja is also home to a colourful variety of butterflies as well as a fine selection of vividly patterned frogs, lizards and snakes – we may even be lucky enough to encounter Hump-nosed Pit Viper or Indian Rock Python!

Night walks are strictly prohibited inside Sinharaja National Park but we'll make concerted efforts to try and find the rare and elusive Spot-bellied Eagle-Owl and Sri Lanka Bay Owl, as well as Sri Lanka Frogmouth outside the reserve. If we still need Serendib Scops Owl, we'll also try our very best to find a roosting bird and our local guides are amazing at finding these, as well as roosting Frogmouths and sometimes even roosting Bay Owl.



Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler by Glen Valentine

Day 11: Sinharaja to Colombo. After some final birding around our lodge grounds, we will depart Sinharaja and drive back toward the capital city of Colombo where the tour will conclude.

FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:

Tour dates, prices, single supplement rates, approximate flight costs and spaces available for this tour are displayed on our website. Please see under IMPORTANT NOTES below.

This includes:

- All meals from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 11;
- Bottled drinking water;
- All lodgings during the tour;
- All ground transportation;
- All national park and other reserve entrance fees; and
- All guiding services (including tips for local guides and services).

The tour fee does not include:

- **ANY** flights;
- Visa fees;
- Any drinks;
- Special gratuities; and
- Telephone calls, laundry and other items of a personal nature.

Single Supplement: The single supplement cost for this tour will be charged if you wish to have single accommodation. If RBL cannot provide you with a rooming partner for these nights although you choose to share, the single supplement will become applicable. We will make all reasonable efforts to ensure that a rooming partner is found if you do wish to share.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

a) Due to constantly fluctuating exchange rates, we quote our tours in 4 currencies. The tour price is however fixed only in the currency printed in bold, and the actual cost in the other currencies listed will be adjusted according to prevailing exchange rates at the time of final invoicing (usually 4 months before the tour.) The same applies to approximate flight and single supplement rates, which are also quoted in the respective fixed currency.

b) Rates are based upon group tariffs; if the tour does not have sufficient registration a small party supplement will have to be charged.

c) Furthermore, these costs are subject to unforeseen increases in tour related costs and may have to be adjusted as a result.

d) Lastly, we may be forced to change or alter the itinerary and / or the designated Rockjumper leader/s at short or no notice due to unforeseen circumstances; please be aware that we will attempt to adhere as close to the original program as possible.

Tipping: As noted above, gratuities (drivers, hotel staff, restaurants etc.) are included on this tour. However, this does NOT include your Rockjumper leader/s. If, therefore, you feel that he/they have given you excellent service, it is entirely appropriate to tip them.

Please note:

- It is important for the comfort of your fellow travellers that you do not over-pack. Kindly stick to 20 kg (44 lb) for check in luggage and 8 kg (18 lb) for hand luggage.

- In certain areas that contain potentially dangerous animals, you are confined to the vehicle and are, quite understandably, not allowed to exit.
- Fitness: This Sri Lanka tour does not require a high level of fitness, but participants should be reasonably fit and in good general health as most of the birding will be done on foot, and may require walking for several hours at a time. Should you have any physical limitations or medical conditions, please notify us in advance of departure. For much of this tour, we will be well away from modern medical facilities.

ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE DETAILS:

This tour **does not** include any airfares. The tour will depart from Colombo International Airport on day 1 no later than **11:00am**. The tour will conclude by midday at Colombo International Airport on day 11.

The above information in respect of arrivals and departures is a guide only. Precise arrival and departure information will be sent to you in your **Tour Confirmation** package once the tour has been officially confirmed. If you wish to arrive early and/or depart late and would like assistance in this regard, kindly contact the Rockjumper office.

FLIGHTS:

Colombo International Airport (IATA: CMB) is the main port of entry for international flights into Sri Lanka and is well serviced by all of the world's major airlines. **Please DO NOT book any flights until you have consulted the Rockjumper office for confirmation on the status of the tour.**