

SLNHS Field Visit Report
Excursion 3rd to 5th March 2017
Mannar, Sri Lanka

PARTICIPANTS

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Friday 3rd March

Our journey started from Ninel's place at 4.30 am Sri Lankan time, courtesy Palitha our driver. After picking up the fellow travellers from pre-specified pick up points we proceeded along the Colombo – Katunayake Expressway. As we were early, none of the breakfast places in Ninel's list were open. Luckily we had enough munchies to go around in the form of Ninel's karapincha paste sandwiches and Ayesha's banana cake! Our first (and only) comfort stop was Puttalam and the team had tea/coffee from the place liberally laced with cognac supplied by the Patron! Thus replenished and relieved, ignoring an ominous silent disapproval of the Patron due to change of planned route through Medawachchiya, we proceeded along the Mannar road (B379) across the Wilpattu National Park.

Crossing Eluwankulama "sapatthupalama" and entering Wilpattu was a lovely experience. The wheels of our van easily cleared the water that was running across the causeway. It would have been a lovely spot for a bath if we had time for one.

The journey across Wilpattu was unlike any game drive. The dusty Mannar road made dustier by racing three wheelers and buses ran across the jungle road. We were fortunate to spot a few wild life - a herd of spotted deer who quickly ran into the jungle, a lonely serpent eagle and a whole lot of bee-eaters.



Passing Silavaturai, we took the South- Coast Road to Arippu – destination Doric's Bungalow or rather its ruins.

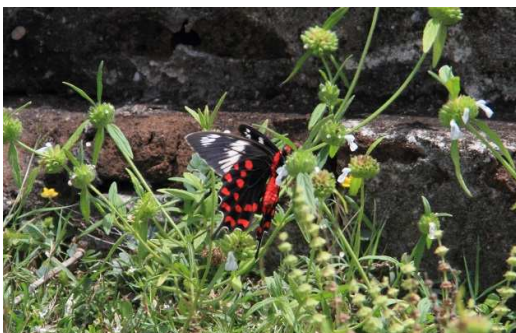
The Doric

The Doric was the residence of the first British Governor of Ceylon, Sir Fredrick North during the pearl oyster fishery. Built at the beginning of the nineteenth century it is known as 'The Doric' due to the architectural design of the columns which was similar to the Ancient Greek Doric order style. Initially built as a two story building constructed using bricks and mortar, the exterior walls had been decorated with chunam which was made from the lime of burnt oyster shells and has been described as appearing like 'marble'. Now mostly in ruins, only a few walls of the ground floor remains but one can still climb up the stairs to what remains of the first floor.



The Doric's Beacon probably served as a navigational mark for boats returning from Kondachchi Bay.

Apart from us there were few other life forms at the Doric's.



There were pieces of pottery and shells for those who wanted them ☺



Getting the group together for a photo was not an easy task, but we eventually managed to do that.

Pic Group at Doric's

Moving along, we made a brief stop at the Arippu Fort. Built by the Portugese and subsequently taken over by the Dutch in 1658, the fort was in ruins. History records that after escaping from the Kandyan Kingdom, Robert Knox of the An Historical Relation of the Island of Ceylon fame, had sought refuge at the Arippu Fort.

Only a few walls were still standing, the area was overgrown and there was no evidence of conservation being even attempted despite it being an archaeological monument.



At the far end of the Fort premises, standing alone was the tombstone of Charles Leys, who had died of a sunstroke!!!



We only had a short stay at the Fort as it started to rain, not that there was much to explore anyway. As we were tired and hungry, we decided to proceed to Mannar without any more stops. The drive was lovely with lush green paddy fields on either side of the road. But stop we did as there

were some birds at Vankalai. They were too far away for anything more than record shots and we had to be contented with shooting the landscape.



It was past 2pm, hungry, grumpy, tired and still a fair distance from our destination when we spotted a flock of pink a bit away from the road. We didn't stop as we were too tired even for flamingos when there was a smaller flock almost by the side of the road. That was too good to pass. Everything else was forgotten, we had to get off the van to see the flamingos 😊 It was a small flock but definitely a treat to watch!



There were few other birds too including a Western-reef egret, but we hardly paid much attention to them.



We reached Lawrence's Four Tees around 3pm where we had a scrumptious lunch – sea-food special, which was to be the theme for the next 2 days too. After a good rest, we decided to go to the salt pans to search for flamingos. While waiting for the van, we saw two white-bellied sea eagles on a tree near the station at Four Tees. They were guarding their nest with two chicks which was nearby.



We made a brief stop to photograph a baobab tree on the way, little realising that we will be photographing practically all the baobab trees in Mannar over the next two days!

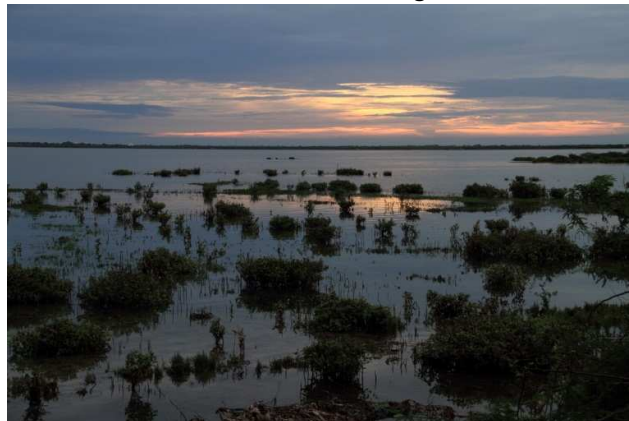


There were no flamingos but we were able to watch a muted yet spectacular sunset.



Saturday 4th March

After a quick cup of tea/coffee we went in search of flamingos and birds, we were not disappointed.





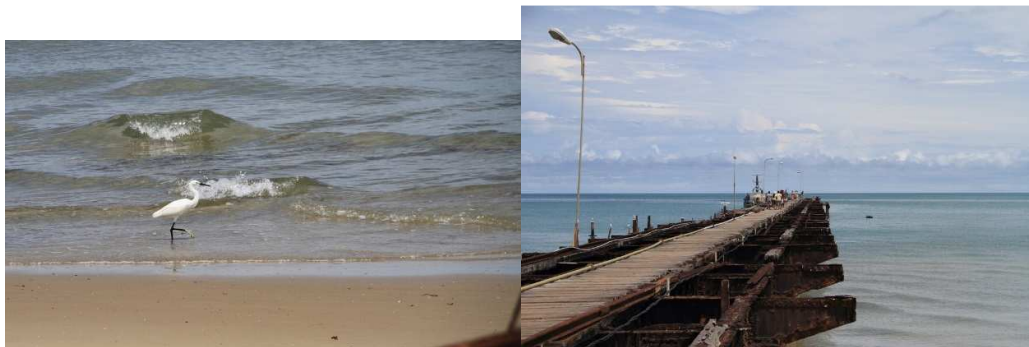
After a yummy breakfast, we set off to explore Mannar. As Doc Malik wanted to look for some specific shells, our first destination was the Pesalaian anchorage, followed by the Talaimannar Pier.

Peaslai Anchorage



The President, SLNHS – with the “Presidential MaduWalige”

Talimannar Pier



On the way back, we did a small detour to see the sand dunes at



After a delicious lunch and a short rest, we set off to explore Baobab trees, Mannar town and the Fort.



The Fort

The square shaped Mannar fort with four bastions was built by Portuguese in 1560. The fort fell to the Dutch in 1658 who rebuilt it in 1696. It was occupied by the British from 1795 until they left the island. In recent years, it was occupied by the Sri Lanka Navy and has now been handed over to the Department of Archaeology.



The Patron - SLNHS



The evening ended with a sea bath for the males who were brave enough to get into the sea in the dark. This was followed by drinks and a valiant attempt by Ninel to get the bird list done ☺ .

Sunday 5th March

The last day saw all of us except Doc Malik, going to see birds again early in the morning.





We started our return journey after breakfast and made short stops at a baobab tree to look at the fruits and at Giant Tank. The tank was dried up and there were very little bird life to be seen.





There was also detour to see the Madu Church.

Pics

That was all we were allowed by the patron. We stopped at Nochhciyagama for lunch and reached Colombo around 6.30 pm bringing another great SLNHS trip to an end.