



Natural History Snippets

Sri Lanka Natural History Society

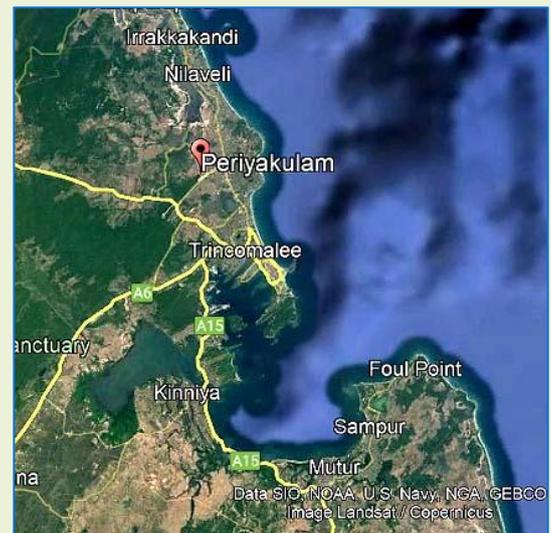
Pages from the Murali Diaries

Observations of an ardent birder

Introducing our first guest contributor

Dr. Murali Vallipuranathan, a Consultant Community Physician, member of the Field Ornithology Group, Sri Lanka. Dr. Murali, as he is generally known, is particularly interested in the birds of the northern parts of the country. He has shared his photographs of northern birds with us, in the medical profession, and I decided to invite him to our Snippets pages as a guest. Here, I share images and descriptive passages of his recent visit to the Periyakulam tank, between Trincomalee and Nilaveli as well as the Kumana National Park and other places.

I hope you enjoy his pictures and descriptions as much as I did.



A New Year's Eve Serenade in Trincomalee

Blue-faced Malkoha

or small green-billed malkoha

(*Phaenicophaeus viridirostris*)

There is a unique kind of magic in witnessing the private lives of nature's most striking inhabitants. On the final day of 2025, I was privileged to capture this intimate moment between a pair of Blue-faced Malkohas.

Beyond their piercing blue eyes and graceful silhouettes, it was their bond that stood out. In a beautiful display of courtship, the sharing of a "nuptial gift (caterpillar)" serves as a tender

reminder that romance is a universal language. A perfect way to bid farewell to the year.

Location: Periyakulam, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

Date: December 31, 2025

A New Year's Eve Encounter with Sri Lanka's most colourful pigeons

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon

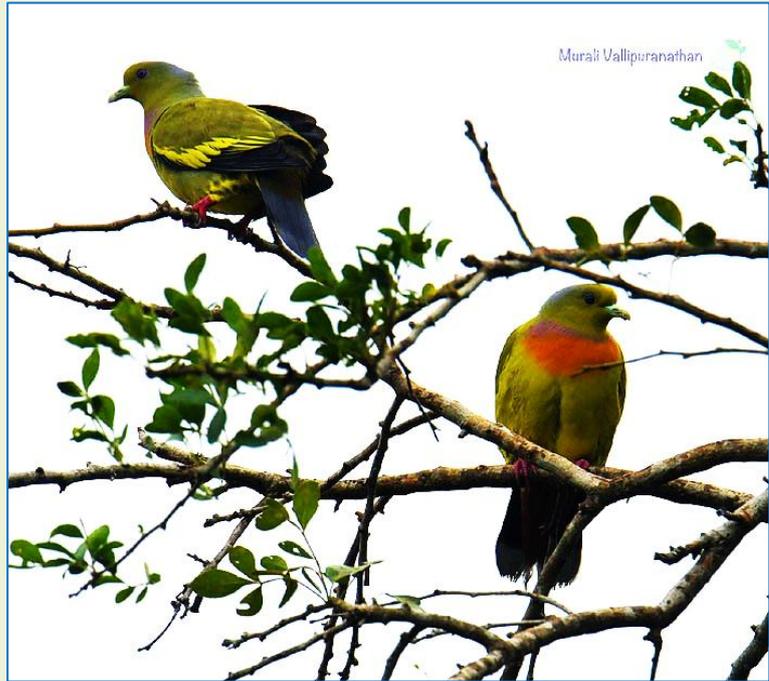
Treron bicinctus

Ending 2025 on a vibrant note! These Orange-breasted Green Pigeons (*Treron bicinctus*) were spotted yesterday (31st December 2025) in the serene surroundings of Periyakulam, Trincomalee. Many birders consider them the most beautiful pigeons in Sri Lanka, and looking at this pair, it is hard to disagree.

🔍 Spotting the Difference: Male vs. Female

In this species, you can easily tell the "king and queen" apart by their plumage:

The Male (right) is the showstopper of the pair. Note the striking lilac band across the upper breast, followed by a broad, vivid orange patch below it. His pastel-green head and blue-grey nape add to his regal appearance.



📍 Observation Details

Location: Off Periyakulam, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka.

Date: December 31, 2025

A Royal Encounter in Trincomalee

Sri Lanka Junglefowl

Gallus lafayettii



Ending the year with a sighting of our national bird is always a privilege. Captured this beautiful pair of Sri Lankan Junglefowl just off Periyakulam, Trincomalee.

The contrast between the male's fiery orange-red plumage and the female's subtle, patterned browns is a perfect example of nature's design. It's a reminder of why we must continue to protect the unique biodiversity that calls our island, home.

The "Master Architect" and the Ultimate Bachelor Pad! 🏠🔗

Baya Weaver

Ploceus philippinus

Witnessing the incredible engineering of a male Baya Weaver off Periyakulam, Trincomalee. These birds are the master weavers of the avian world. This male has spent days meticulously knotting and weaving long strips of grass to create this hanging masterpiece. When complete it will have a concealed nest chamber entered through a vertical tunnel from below.

Now, the hard part begins. He must wait for a female to inspect his handiwork. If she approves of the craftsmanship and the security of the site, she'll move in!

📍 Observation Details

📍 Location: Periyakulam, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka

📅 Date: 31.12.2025



Clash of the Titans at Kumana

Sri Lankan Spotted Deer

Axis axis ceylonensis



Witnessing the raw power of nature! On December 27th, while exploring the plains of Kumana National Park, I came across these two male Sri Lankan Spotted Deer locked in a fierce battle for dominance.

Unlike their counterparts in temperate climates, our spotted deer can breed throughout the year, meaning these "battles of the antlers" can

happen at any time. The clashing sound of bone on bone in the stillness of the park is a reminder of the survival of the fittest in our beautiful wilderness.

A truly humbling experience to capture this moment of strength and grace. 🦌🔗



📷 Sight of a Lifetime: The Giant of Kumana The Black-necked Stork

Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus

They say some encounters are worth the wait, and today (December 28, 2025) Kumana National Park delivered. Standing tall amidst the marshy grasslands was one of Sri Lanka's rarest and most majestic residents: the Black-necked Stork.

With only a handful (circa 50) of these birds estimated to be in the entire country, every sighting is a vital record for conservation. Seeing its iridescent plumage catch the light and those impossibly long, coral-red legs wade through the water was a masterclass in avian elegance.

🔍 Identifying the Bird: Male or Female? In the world of Black-necked Storks, the secret to their sex

is in their eyes. The male bird has deep brown or black irises and the female bird has bright, striking yellow irises. Looking closely at this individual's piercing yellow eye, we can confirm this is a female. The females of this species are arguably even more striking than the males because of that golden gaze!

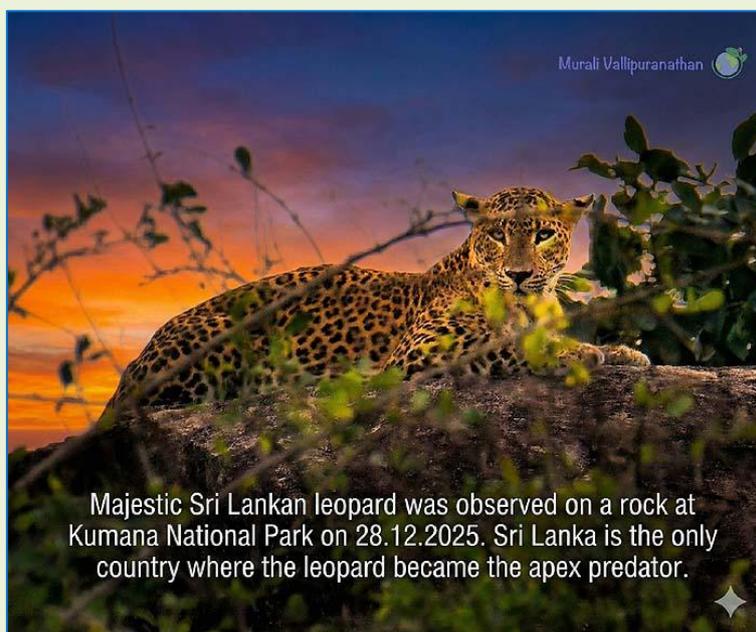
💡 Quick Facts about the "Rare Giant":

Status: Critically Endangered in Sri Lanka. It is the tallest wading bird in the country.

The Colours: While it looks "black and white," a closer look reveals a beautiful iridescent green and purple sheen on its neck and head.

The Bill: That massive, heavy bill is designed for precision, allowing it to snatch up fish, frogs, and even water snakes with lightning speed.

It's a sobering reminder of the beauty we have to protect. A huge thank you to the wild spaces of Kumana for this unforgettable year-end gift! 🌿 🦶



Majestic Sri Lankan leopard was observed on a rock at Kumana National Park on 28.12.2025. Sri Lanka is the only country where the leopard became the apex predator. ✨

A Royal Profile: The Crown of Kumana 📷

Indian Peafowl

Pavo cristatus

While the massive train of a Peacock often steals the show, there is a quiet, intricate majesty in the details of its head. Captured on a crisp morning at Kumana National Park (28.12.2025), this close-up reveals the true artistry of nature:

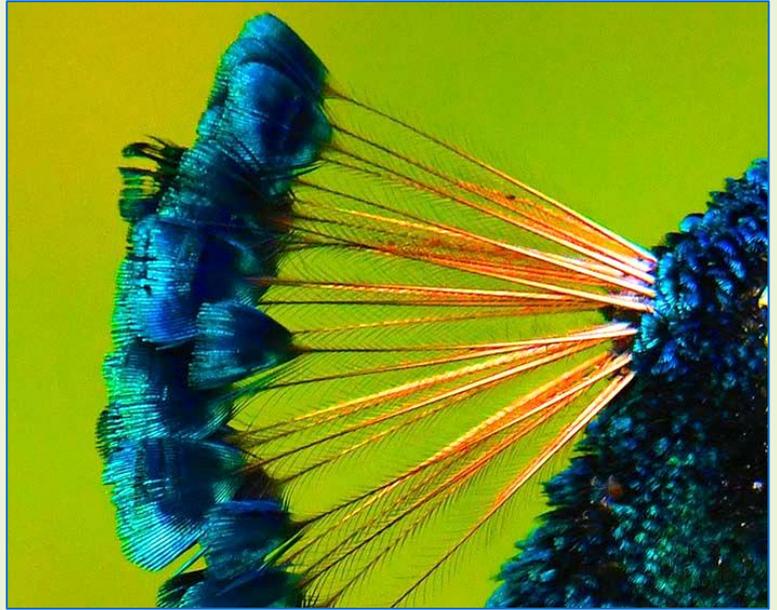
The Corona: That delicate, fan-shaped crest isn't just for decoration. These feathers act as "antennae," sensitive to the low-frequency vibrations made by other peacocks.

Structural Brilliance: The deep cobalt blue of the neck isn't a result of simple pigment. It is "structural colour"—microscopic, crystal-like structures on the feathers that refract light to create that unmistakable metallic shimmer.

The Gaze: Note the stark white patches around the eyes; they serve to emphasize the bird's alertness, a vital trait for one of the most iconic residents of the Sri Lankan wilderness.

Nature is often at its most beautiful when we take a moment to look closely at the things we think we already know.

📍 Location: Kumana National Park, Sri Lanka 📅 Date: December 28, 2025 📷
Subject: Indian Peafowl (Male)



Nature's Royal Welcoming Committee! 📷

What a way to begin the journey. Just as we reached the entrance of Kumana National Park on December 27th, we were greeted by this magnificent sight.

This fully grown peacock decided to show off his spectacular train in all its glory. It's one thing to see them in photos but standing there as the morning light hits those iridescent feathers is a reminder of why Kumana remains one of the most magical places for any wildlife lover.

A perfect start to an unforgettable day in the wild. 📷

The Long-Billed Legend of Kathiraveli!
Loten's Sunbird
Cinnyris lotenius

Also known as the Long-billed Sunbird, these birds are the ultimate specialists of the Sri Lankan bush. If you look at that signature beak, you're looking at a masterpiece of evolution! Why are they so special?

The "Precision Tool": That long, sickle-shaped curve isn't just for aesthetics. It's a specialized "straw" designed to reach nectar deep inside tubular flowers that other birds—and even most bees—simply can't access.

Structural Magic: The male's dark plumage looks almost black at first glance, but when the Eastern Province sun hits it at the right angle, it explodes into metallic purples and greens.



Murali Vallipurathan



Murali Vallipurathan

This isn't just pigment; it's structural coloration—light refracting off microscopic structures in their feathers!

A Rare Duo: Seeing the pair together is a treat. While the male brings the "bling," the female is a master of camouflage in her olive-yellow tones, often the one doing the heavy lifting in building their intricate, hanging "purse" nests.

It's a beautiful reminder that in nature, being "extra" (like that beak!) is usually the secret to survival.



Location: Kathiraveli, Sri Lanka (arrowed; north of Vakara, east of Somawathiya National Park). Date: December 30, 2025.

Text and photography by Murali Vallipurathan

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