



Natural History Snippets

Sri Lanka Natural History Society

Pages from the Murali Diaries – Part 3

Observations of an ardent birder

Introducing our guest contributor

Dr. Murali Vallipuranathan is a Consultant Community Physician and member of the Field Ornithology Group, Sri Lanka. Dr. Murali, as he is generally known, continues to share his observations and photographs of birds, and other wildlife at times. His images are the inspiration for the lucid comments accompanying each image. These images and paragraphs were first circulated privately amongst the members of the Sri Lanka Medical Association's Council. They are reproduced here with his permission.

This is the concluding part of these little bird essays, if I might term them so.



Habitat: Tall lakeside grasses and reeds (their favourite hangout for snacks).

Why They're Special: These birds are the definition of "social butterflies." They rarely travel alone, usually moving in synchronized waves through the grass. Seeing them in the wild is a lesson in coordination; one bird moves, and the whole "cloud" follows. In the quiet serenity of Periyakulam, their soft chirping was the perfect soundtrack to close out the year.

New Year's Eve Guests

The Tricoloured Munias of Periyakulam

Lonchura malacca



While most people were busy prepping for countdowns and fireworks on December 31st, the marshes of Periyakulam, Trincomalee were hosting a much more elegant celebration.

I spotted a vibrant flock of Tricoloured Munias making the most of the final golden hour of 2025. These little finches are like nature's tiny fashionistas—sporting that signature jet-black head, snow-white belly, and rich chestnut back.

Observation Details

Location: Periyakulam, Trincomalee, Sri Lanka 📍

Date: December 31, 2025 📅

Fun Fact: Despite their delicate look, these birds are incredibly hardy and play a huge role in the local ecosystem by dispersing seeds across the wetlands. A perfect, peaceful end to 2025. Here's to more feathered finds in the year ahead!



Murali Vallipuranathan

Spotting the Nomads of the Scrub Brahminy Starlings at Periyakulam *Sturnia pagodarum*

While many birdwatchers look forward to winter for the arrival of long-distance migrants from the far north, some of the most dynamic avian movements happen much closer to home. On December 31, 2025, I managed to capture this pair of Brahminy Starlings perched beautifully amidst the foliage at Periyakulam, Trincomalee.

With their distinct black crests, striking pale-blue eyes, and rich, pastel-tawny plumage, they are always a pleasure to photograph. But beyond their looks, their presence in Trincomalee highlights a fascinating aspect of their behaviour.

The Mystery of Resident Nomads

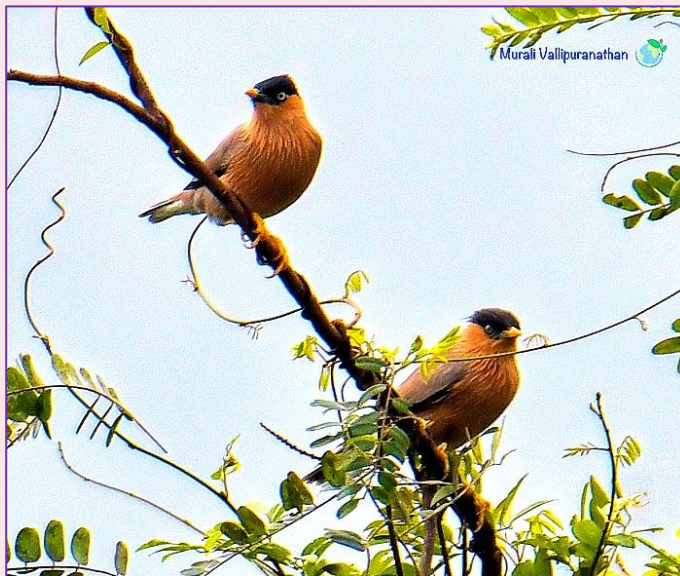
Unlike the classic migrants that travel thousands of kilometres on fixed seasonal schedules, Brahminy Starlings are widely classified as resident nomads or local altitudinal migrants across the Indian subcontinent.

Weather-Driven Wanderers: Their movements are largely dictated by monsoons, rainfall patterns, and food availability rather than strict seasonal clocks.

The Sri Lankan Context: In Sri Lanka, they are primarily residents of the dry zone, frequently found in scrub jungles, open forests, and coastal areas. However, they are highly opportunistic. When dry conditions set in or

local fruiting and insect populations shift, entire flocks will suddenly vacate an area and travel locally to find better foraging grounds. They are also winter visitors from India.

The Perfect Pitstop: Wetlands and surrounding scrub like Periyakulam provide an ideal sanctuary for these omnivorous feeders, offering a rich supply of insects, berries, and nectar to fuel their nomadic journeys. Catching them perfectly framed on the branch together was a fantastic way to wrap up a day in the field!
Murali Vallipurathan

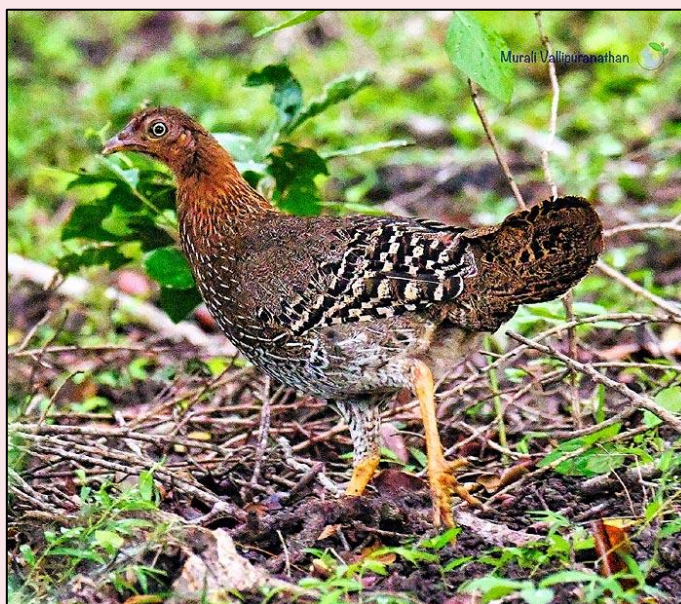


Queen of the Undergrowth: The Sri Lankan Junglefowl Hen *Gallus lafayettii*



While the males usually steal the spotlight with their vibrant, fiery plumage, the female Sri Lankan Junglefowl is a masterclass in subtle elegance and survival.

Captured stepping gracefully through the leaf litter of Kumana National Park, this stunning hen shows off the intricate, checkerboard-like patterns and earthy tones that keep her perfectly camouflaged from predators while nesting on the forest floor.



Location: Kumana National Park



Observation Details

Species:

Sri Lankan Junglefowl (Hen)
– Endemic to Sri Lanka

Date: December 28, 2025

Murali Vallipurathan



Nature's Ultimate Showstopper!

The Indian peafowl

Pavo cristatus



Talk about being in the right place at the absolute right time. While exploring the untamed wilderness of Kumana National Park on December 28, 2025, this magnificent male peacock decided to put on a masterclass in romance and drama.

Captured perfectly, he unfurled his iridescent train completely into a massive, shimmering fan of emerald greens, deep blues, and striking eyespots.

Stepping into Kumana always feels like walking into a living documentary, but witnessing a full courtship display against the lush, green backdrop of the park is a moment I won't forget soon.



Location: Kumana National Park, Sri Lanka

Date: December 28, 2025
Murali Vallipurathan

Peafowl is a common name for two bird species of the genus *Pavo* and one species of the closely related genus *Afropavo* within the tribe Pavonini of the family Phasianidae (the pheasants and their allies). Male peafowl are referred to as **peacocks**, and female peafowl are referred to as **peahens**. Despite this, peacock is usually used to refer to both sexes, in common language.

The two Asiatic species are the blue or Indian peafowl originally from the Indian subcontinent, and the green peafowl from Southeast Asia. The third peafowl species, the Congo peafowl, is native only to the Congo Basin.

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peafowl>

Text and photography by Murali Vallipurathan

Additional material and Design
Malik Fernando