

SLNHS Field Visit Report
Muthurajawela Wetlands, Sri Lanka
Saturday 30th June 2018



Muthurajawela - the Hamilton Canal leading to the Negombo Lagoon

Participants

Malik Fernando, Ninel Fernando, Chris & Enoke Corea, Magdon Jayasuriya, Nandalal Ranasinghe, Vasantha Jayasuriya, Sri Srikumar, Harshini De Silva, Mohan De Zylva, Kiran Kumaranayagam, Errol Anthonisz, Rashid & Ayesha Abdur-Rahman, Shanthi & Shiranee Rasaratnam, Padmini Seneviratne, Thivanshi & Navodith Fernando, Ranil Milantha and Lal Motha - a total of 21 eager souls venturing out together into the mangroves of the Muthurajawela wetlands.

Travel Route

Colombo – Borella - Dematagoda– Kelani Bridge – Katunayake Expressway - Wattala – Ja Ela - Kandana – Bopitiya - Pamunugama – Muthurajawela visitor centre.

Theme

The main theme of the field visit was to observe the various plant species, bird life and the wetland ecosystem in the southern part of the lagoon forming the Muthurajawela wetland.

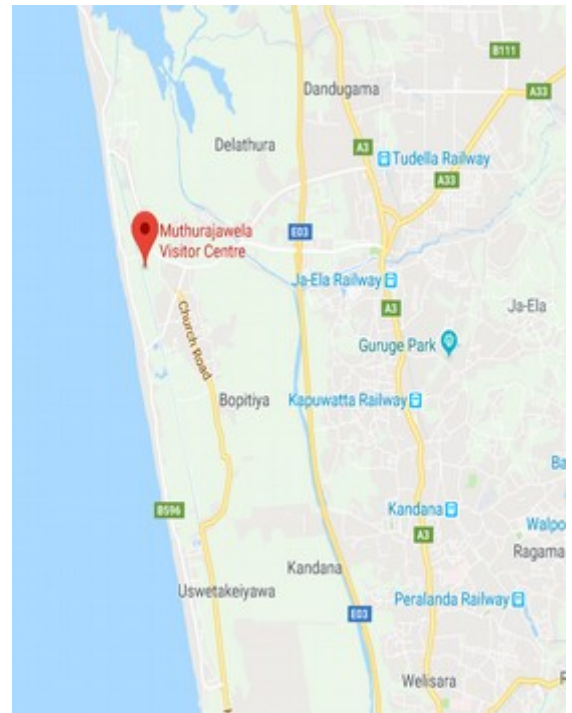
Muthurajawela Wetlands

(WIKIPEDIA)

Muthurajawela is a marsh in Sri Lanka in the southern region of the Negombo lagoon, 30 km (19miles) north of Colombo. The Muthurajawela Marshes are 3,068 ha (7,580 acres) in area and the country's largest saline coastal peat bog. The marsh is notable for its unique and highly diverse ecosystem and is listed as one of 12 priority wetlands in Sri Lanka. "Muthurajawela" translates to "Field of Royal Treasure".

The marsh is believed to have originated about 7,000 years ago. In 1996 1,777 ha (4,390 acres) of the northern part of the Muthurajawela marsh was declared a wetland sanctuary, under the Flora and Fauna Protection Act, in recognition of its vast bio-diversity. The region supports 192 distinct species of flora and 209 distinct species of fauna, including Slender Loris, as well as another 102 species of birds. Some of the identified species have been shown to be indigenous to the marsh.

The marsh is a major local and tourist attraction, primarily for sightseeing and boating tours, and the area also supports local agriculture and forestry. Visitors to the region are guided through the sanctuary areas by the staff of the Muthurajawela Visitor Centre to avoid serious harm to the marsh ecosystem.



Contact Details

Muthurajawela Visitor Centre,
Indigaslanda, Bopitiya, Pamunugama
Phone 011 403 0150
Fax 011 488 7325
Mobile (Sanath) 076 620 5745
www.muthurajawelavisitorcentre.org

Activities

Most participants were picked up from designated spots and we departed from Colombo, on time, at 0600 hours. Further participants embarked along the way. Enoka read out excerpts from the book "Muthurajawela – an eyeful of bounteous nature" by Henry P. Abeysekera, which was quite informative and appreciated. Interested persons are urged to read this book since it contains a wealth of information on Muthurajawela. Those who had brought along their breakfast appeased their hunger whilst on the move. The comfort stop and breakfast was at the P & S at Kandana.

We reached the Muthurajawela Visitor Centre, beside the Hamilton canal, by 0730 hours. Dr. Magdon J explained the topology of the Muthurajawela wetlands and its unique mangrove ecosystem, almost half of which was comprised of the Negombo lagoon; the southern part of which was the subject of our visit. We traveled in two flat bottomed boats powered by outboard motors. The guides who accompanied us, together with Dr. Magdon J, identified the various mangrove vegetation as we cruised along. Dr. Magdon J stated that the mangrove vegetation in this area was limited to a few species because of the lower salinity that prevailed due to fresh water inflows

into this area. He also stated that the swamp provided ideal breeding grounds for crocodiles; a few of whose young were seen in these waters.



Dr. Magdon J, giving a preliminary briefing



Dr. Magdon J, explains

The desirability of disembarking on firm land within the mangrove system and of walking paths, to enable a closer and more detailed examination of this unique ecosystem was noted. Such a facility could be afforded to keen visitors on a few selected islands, since observation from the boat was restricted to the rather limited plant species on the periphery of the mangroves.



One of two boats leaves along the Hamilton Canal, bound for the Negombo Lagoon



Bola Kaduru, the dried seed was used as a very effective improvised Cricket Ball



Maha Kadol, with buttress roots



Mal Kadol



Katu Ikkiriya



Close up of Katu Ikkiriya



Karan Koku, an indicator of brackish water



the tender leaves of the Karan Koku are edible



Maha Kadol, with its butress (prop) roots, clearly visible



Bata (pronounced butter), used for weaving handicrafts



in the Negombo Lagoon



Gan Suriya, with its yellow flowers



Visi Dal fishing



line fishing

Mas Aththu Fishing



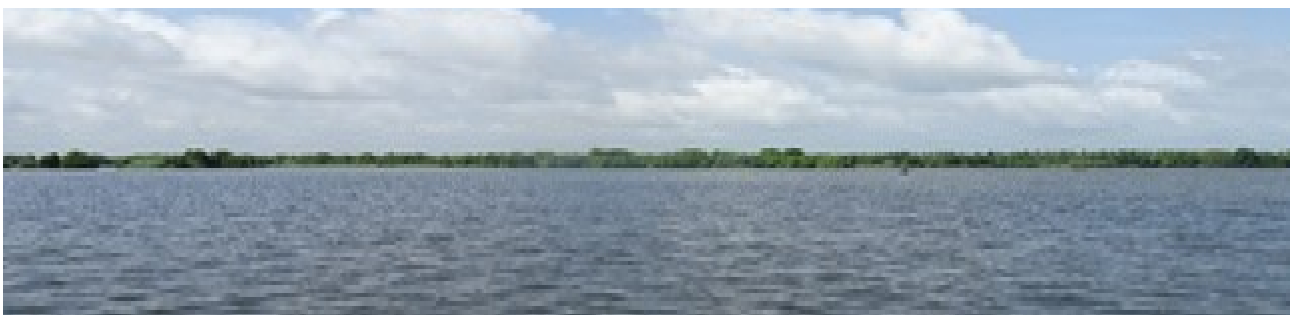
a rectangular plot is filled with broken branches (mas aththu), to simulate a mangrove area



after many days, this rectangular plot which is now rich with mangrove based inhabitants is completely surrounded with fish nets



the fisherman then wades into the plot and gathers his catch





Purple Heron



Brahminy Kite



White bellied Sea Eagle - one of many seen



Stork billed Kingfisher



Pied Kingfisher



Toque Monkey, feeding on a Sea Mango, Val Anodha



aerial roots of the Kirala Tree - the spongy roots were used for making cork bottle stoppers



We returned to the visitor centre after an enjoyable and educative boat ride of 90 minutes. Thereafter we left towards the Bopitiya area and stopped over at a guest house by the beach for lunch. The sea was very rough and unsafe for bathing and the swimming pool quite uninviting. A period of camaraderie preceded the vegetable fried rice, prawn and chicken curry lunch. A welcome desert of rambutans, freshly picked from Chris's estate and P & S cup cakes provided by Padmini were quite a treat.



SLNHS Group Visit to Muthurajawela

After lunch we traveled by coach along the Pamunugama road to Negombo and back, disembarking close to the Negombo lagoon to view the beach. The beach sand was almost black in colour with Ilmenite, Rutile and Monazite. Thereafter we traveled back to Colombo, dropping participants along the way to reach Colombo around 1700 hours, thus bringing to an end an educative and enjoyable field visit.

IN GENERAL

The weather was hot and sunny and reasonably cool due to the slight breeze. We were afforded the opportunity to view the wetland with its unique mangrove vegetation and trees whilst traveling by boat. The presence of Dr. Magdon J, with his expert knowledge made this experience interesting and educative. The lack of places to disembark and examine the area more closely and footpaths through the firm parts of the wetland habitat was a need that should be examined. A total of 24 species of resident birds were seen. A visit during the migrant season would no doubt have resulted in many more birds sightings. The list of birds sighted during our visit is attached.

Our appreciation to :-

- SLNHS and specially to Ninel for the time and effort spent in organizing the trip and the logistical arrangements
- Dr. Magdon Jayasuriya for sharing his knowledge on wetlands and their unique mangrove vegetation
- Coach driver Kelum for his careful driving and bringing us home safe and sound
- Sanath and his two assistants at the Muthurajawela Visitor Centre for the safe and comfortable boat rides and their guidance
- All our participants for their pleasant friendly companionship and camaraderie which added greatly to an enjoyable trip.



This field visit report was compiled by Sri, with photographs by Sri. The views expressed are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the SLNHS.

BIRD TALLY LIST – 30th June 2018

Compiled by Sri

<u>Name</u>	<u>Scientific Name</u>
1 Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>
2 Asian Openbill	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>
3 Black-headed Ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>
4 Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>
5 Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
6 Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
7 Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
8 Green backed (striated) Heron	<i>Butorides striata javanicus</i>
9 House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
10 Indian Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>
11 Indian Pond Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii grayii</i>
12 Little Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>
13 Pheasant-tailed Jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
14 Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
15 Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>
16 Purple-rumped Sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>
17 Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
18 Rose Ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
19 Spotted Dove	<i>Stigmatopelia chinensis</i>
20 Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>
21 White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caeruleascens</i>
22 White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>
23 White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
24 White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>