

Field Visit to Hambantota (Oct. 4th - 6th, 2024)

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Introduction

This report details the activities and observations made during the Sri Lanka Natural History Society (SLNHS) tour of the Hambantota region from October 4th to 6th, 2023. The tour focused on exploring sites of historical and environmental significance of Hambantota District.

Day 1: Friday, October 4th

Madunagala Hot Springs

The tour began at Madunagala Hot Springs, renowned for their therapeutic properties. These natural hot springs are set in a serene environment, making them a popular destination for both locals and tourists seeking relaxation and health benefits.



Tamarind Tree of Leonard Woolf



Next, the group visited the Tamarind Tree linked to Leonard Woolf, a key literary figure of the early 20th century. Woolf served as an Assistant Government Agent in Hambantota between 1908 and 1911. His most famous work, *Village in the Jungle*, vividly depicts the hardships of a poor family in a jungle village, offering a rare local perspective on colonial life. This tree stands as a historical landmark, bridging literature and nature, and reflecting Woolf's time in Sri Lanka and his contributions to its literary heritage.

Andare's Tomb and Statue

The team explored Andare's tomb and statue, dedicated to Andare, a beloved local jester known for his wit and humor. This site highlights the cultural narratives that shape Sri Lankan identity, celebrating folklore and traditional storytelling.

Dry Zone Botanical Gardens

The day concluded at the Mirijjawila Botanical Gardens, which span over 300 acres. These gardens feature a diverse collection of native and exotic plant species, emphasizing conservation efforts. Participants observed various ecosystems within the gardens, including tropical flora and medicinal plants. The gardens serve as an educational resource for visitors and play a crucial role in preserving Sri Lanka's botanical heritage.



Day 2: Saturday, October 5th

Birdwatching in Bundala Environs

The second day focused on birdwatching in the Bundala area, part of a designated Ramsar Wetland site. Participants identified numerous bird species, including migratory birds. The rich biodiversity of this area makes it an essential habitat for both resident and migratory avifauna.





Observing the biological control of invasive *Opuntia dillenii* using cochineal insects; formally used as crimson -edible food coloring.

Godawaya

The group visited Godawaya, a former river estuary of the Walawe River characterized by its unique ecological features. The site provides insights into historical river dynamics and is notable for its Garnet-rich beach and rounded rocks shaped by exfoliation weathering.



Godawaya estuary

Ussangoda National Park

Participants explored Ussangoda National Park, known for its distinctive geological formations, Fe rich soils and rich biodiversity. The park features rare flora adapted to its unique soil conditions, including endemic species that thrive in this environment.



Long views of Ussangoda

Ruhuna Magama Heritage Museum

The tour included a visit to the Ruhuna Magama Heritage Museum, where participants learned about local history through artifacts that reflect the cultural richness of the Hambantota region. The museum showcases items from ancient civilizations, providing context to Sri Lanka's historical narrative.



Light-house and the Martello Tower

Participants examined the remains of a Martello tower, one of several coastal defense structures built during colonial times. This site offers insights into Sri Lanka's colonial history and military architecture.



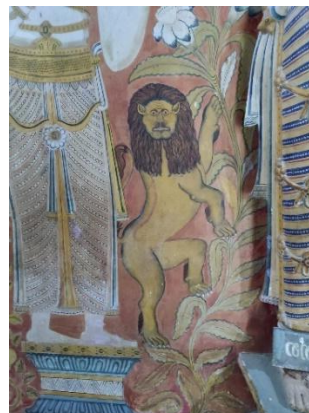
Bata Atha Agro-Technology Park

The group visited Bata Atha Agro Technology Park, which showcases innovative agricultural practices aimed at sustainable development. Participants learned about modern farming techniques that integrate technology with traditional practices to enhance productivity while preserving environmental integrity.



Kasagala Temple

The final site visited was Kasagala Temple, an important religious site that reflects the spiritual heritage of the region. This temple is known for its intricate architecture and serene atmosphere, serving as a place of worship and reflection for both locals and visitors.



Conclusion

The SLNHS tour of the Hambantota region provided participants with valuable insights into both historical and environmental aspects of Sri Lanka. Through visits to significant sites, members gained a deeper understanding of local biodiversity and cultural narratives that shape this unique area.

Appendix 1:

Birds observed at Dry Zone Botanic Garden

Little green bee-eater
Yellow-billed babbler
White-throated kingfisher
Red-vented bulbul
Asian Koel
Spotted dove
Common myna

Birds observed at Bundala National Park

Sunbird	Pelican	Barn swallow
Waterhen	Purple Heron	Black-headed oriole
Black robin	Spoonbills	Little green bee-eater
White-browed bulbul	Black-headed ibis	Spoonbill grey heron
Blue-tailed bee-eater	Common sandpiper	Curlew sandpiper
Painted stork	Little stint	Ruddy turnstone
Pheasant-tailed jacana	Great Thick-knee	Western swamphen
Spot-billed pelican	Black-tailed godwit	White-bellied Sea eagle
Common redshank	Little ringed plover	Cormorants
Rose-ringed parakeet	Kentish plover	Snipes
Weaver Bird	Black-winged stilt	Grey-headed fish eagle
Pacific golden plover	Marsh sandpiper	Osprey
Lesser sand plover	Wood sandpiper	

Appendix 2:

Plant species observed at the Dry zone Botanic Gardens

Common name	Scientific name	Family	Native/non-native	Conservation status
Maliththan	<i>Salvadora persica</i>	Salvadoraceae	Native	LC-Least Concern
Kaha karanda	<i>Dendrolobium umbellatum</i>	Fabaceae	Non-native	
Gansuriya	<i>Thespesia populnea</i>	Malvaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern
Milla	<i>Vitex altissima</i>	Myrtaceae	Native	
Aralu	<i>Terminalia chebula</i>	Combretaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern

Bulu	<i>Terminalia bellirica</i>	Combretaceae	Native	
Nelli	<i>Phyllanthus emblica</i>	Phyllanthaceae	Native	VU - Vulnerable
Hik	<i>Lannea coromandelica</i>	Anacardiaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern
Neralu	<i>Elaeodendron glaucum</i>	Celastraceae	Endemic	LC- Least Concern
Baobab tree	<i>Adansonia digitata</i>	Malvaceae	Non-native	
Siyambala	<i>Tamarindus indica</i>	Fabaceae	Non-native	
Kohomba	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>	Meliaceae	Non-native	
Palu	<i>Manilkara hexandra</i>	Sapotaceae	Native	NT-Near Threatened
Mee	<i>Madhuca longifolia</i>	Sapotaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern
Pare mara	<i>Samanea saman</i>	Fabaceae	Exotic - Naturalized	

Plant species observed at the Bundala National Park

Common name	Scientific name	Family	Native/non-native	Conservation status
Kalapu andara - invasive	<i>Neltuma juliflora</i>	Fabaceae	Exotic - IAS - Invasive Alien Species	
Ranawara	<i>Senna auriculata</i>	Fabaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern
weera	<i>Drypetes sepiaria</i>	Putranjivaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern
palu	<i>Manilkara hexandra</i>	Sapotaceae	Native	NT-Near Threatened
daluk	<i>Euphorbia antiquorum</i>	Euphorbiaceae	Native	LC- Least Concern