

A TINY GUIDE TO SRI LANKA'S

SQUIRRELS



THE
CEYLON PRESS

In a
Word
or Two

Sri Lanka is home to seven squirrel species, only two of which are endemic, the Dusky-Striped Squirrel and Layard's Palm Squirrel. The other five are globe trotters by comparison: the Grizzled Giant Squirrel; the Black Giant Squirrel; the Nilgiri Striped Squirrel; the Indian Palm Squirrel or Three-Striped Palm Squirrel; and the Indian Giant Flying Squirrel.

They feat off almost any plants including nuts, seeds, fruits, fungi, and green vegetation, and have been known to enrich their diet with bird eggs and insects too,

Their constant nibbling of course wears down their teeth, and so, in a little bit of evolution that mankind might have benefited from as well, their teeth just keep on growing, to make up the loss.

Collectively, they are what rats might be - if rats had any sense of fashion, PR or merely a dude-cool attitude. Nimble, beautiful, curious, and cute, they are rodents merely by genus.

Even so, there remains something edgy about them. It is a squirrel after all who provokes the discovery of a massive diamond in F Scott Fitzgerald's story "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz," a tale of excess and debauchery. Nor does Beatrix Potter's Squirrel Nutkin do much better, being chronically naughty. "Proud, wayward squirrel," noted Yeats of a beast so easily and effortlessly seen across Sri Lanka.

1

THE BLACK GIANT
SQUIRREL

Closely related to the medium / large sized shrew, *Suncus Murinus* that is commonly found in India, the Ceylon Highland Shrew (*Suncus Murinus Montanus*) is so distinctly different in scientific terms as to win a place as one of just six endemic shrews that live in Lanka. Highly endangered and restricted to the central highlands of the country, it presents itself with an unapologetic style, being rat-like and grey, its take-it-or-leave-it attitude of little help to environmental publicists eager to drum up the sympathy that any endangered animal merits.

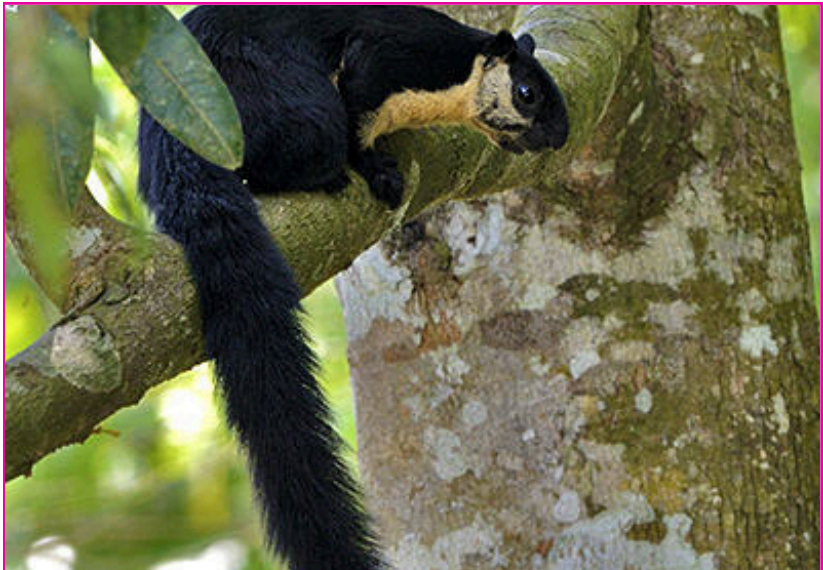


Image courtesy of ecology asia

2

THE DUSTY
STRIPED SQUIRREL

Barely twenty centimetres long, nose to nail, with grey fur and a preference for subtropical or tropical forests, the Ceylon Jungle Shrew (*Suncus Zeylanicus*) is one of just six endemic shrews on the island.

Seeing one is a rare sight for the tiny creature is highly endangered as well as being, like most shrews, a determinedly nocturnal beast.



Image courtesy of [Chlidonias](#).

3

THE GRIZZLED
GIANT SQUIRREL

The Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Ratufa macroura*) is the king of the pack, with a nose to tail length of 1.5 metres and death-defying skills enabling it to make the most impossible leaps from tree to tree. In Sri Lanka it hugs the central highlands and comes in 3 sub variants that are all but impossible to tell apart: *Ratufa macroura macroura*, *Ratufa macroura Dandolena* and *Ratufa macroura Melanochra*. Grizzled brown, with white legs, stomach, and frosted face, they have excellent vision but poor hearing – which is something of a blessing for them as their cry - a shrill staccato cackle – is the sort of sound that can easily curdle milk.



Image of Ratufa Macroura, courtesy of Steve Garvie.

4

THE INDIAN GIANT
FLYING SQUIRREL

The most elegantly avian of the squirrels found on the island is the Indian Giant Flying Squirrel (*Petaurista philippensis*), which has evolved a remarkable wing membrane between its limbs to enable it to glide like the 1891 Lilienthal Glider that marked man's first recoded flight, near Potsdam.



Image courtesy of PatatasFrittas

5

THE INDIAN PALM
OR THREE-STRIPED
PALM SQUIRREL

The Indian Palm Squirrel or Three-Striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus palmarum*) is another island visitor that is easily confused with the endemic Layard's Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus layardi*).



Image courtesy of Yathin S Krishnappa

6

LAYARD'S PALM
SQUIRREL

Layard's Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus layardi*) is named for Edgar Leopold Layard, one of those legendary Victorian all-rounders, who took on a diplomatic career, the better to document the natural world, a passion he put down to lacking any siblings when growing up. He spent ten years on the island, leaving behind a variety of animals named after him, including a parrot and this, the popular and endemic island squirrel, sometimes also known as the Flame-Striped Jungle Squirrel for the beautiful markings that run along its back. It is



A lithograph by Jan Brandes of the Palm Squirrel. Public Domain.

about thirty centimetres nose to tail, with black fur that fades to reddish brown on its stomach and can be seen all around the central highlands. By day they forage for fruit and nuts; by night they chatter from tree to tree, living, like swans, in pairs that bond for life. With their natural forest habitat eroded steadily, they are categorised as Vulnerable.

7

THE NILGIRI
STRIPED SQUIRREL

The tiny dark brown Nilgiri Striped Squirrel (*Funambulus sublineatus*) is the mystery of the pack for almost nothing is known about it except for the fact that it is different to the Dusky-Striped Squirrel (*Funambulus sublineatus obscurus*), with which it was once confused.



Image courtesy of iNaturalist UK



THE CEYLON PRESS

A small island surrounded by large oceans. Sri Lanka is a well-kept secret. The Ceylon Press aims to make its story more accessible.

11A ▶

12

11A ▶

12

The Ceylon Press is based at and partially funded by The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, a jungle-luxe retreat abandoned in war, reclaimed by nature, and now, gorgeously restored and there to be enjoyed by anyone in search of utter peace



Companions to Sri Lanka's History; Travel & Place; Food, Fauna & Flora; Belief, Society & Culture.



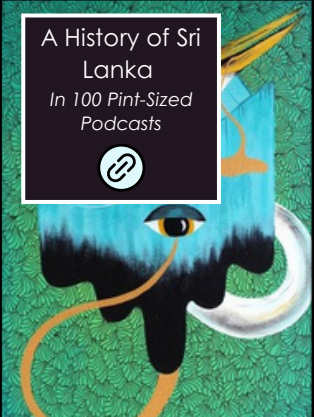
11A ▶

12

11A ▶

12

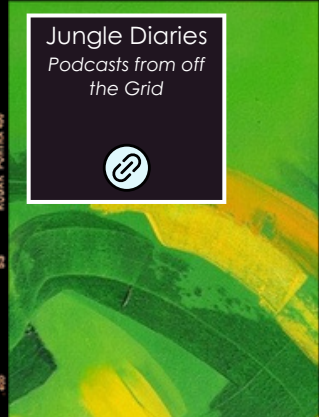
A History of Sri Lanka
In 100 Pint-Sized Podcasts



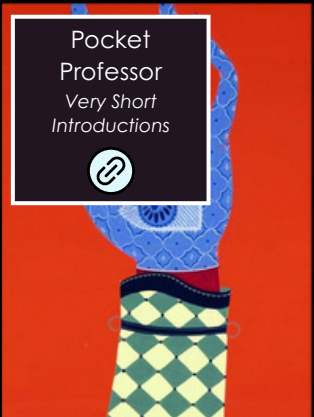
The Story of Sri Lanka
Podcast Pictures of the Island



Jungle Diaries
Podcasts from off the Grid



Pocket Professor
Very Short Introductions



Tiny Guides
Sri Lanka, Instantly



ALT Guides
Magical alternatives

