

A CEYLON
PRESS TINY
GUIDE

A CHECKLIST
TO THE 11
EXTINCT
LAND
MAMMALS
OF SRI LANKA

EXTINCT MAMMALS



1 THE CHEETAH

Palaeontologists are divided as to whether a small set of fossils denotes the existence of a unique Sri Lankan variant of the Indian Chetah, a marginally different mammal to the Sri Lankan leopard that still exists today.

2 THE DEER

Smaller than its modern counterpart was *Muva Sinhaleya*, a species of Sambur deer similar to the one alive today.

3

THE ELEPHANT

The remarkable remains of three elephant species, all now extinct were found on the island. The current and endangered Sri Lankan Elephant is considered to be a subspecies of *Elephas Maximus Sinhaleyus*, whose treasured fossils, unearthed in Kuruwita, indicates that it last lived 100,000 years ago. Its similarity to the present-day elephant is likely to have made it all but impossible to tell them apart, the difference lying in such things as smaller molars and a wider spout. A scant dusting of other fossils reveal the existence of two further elephant sub species - *Hysundricus* and *Namadicus Sinhaleyus* - that may have called Sri Lanka home before vanishing.

4 THE GAUR

Once common throughout South and Southeast Asia, the Gaur, or Indian bison, lived as a distinct sub species here - *Bibos Sinhaleyus Deraniyagala*. It was last spotted by British adventurers in 1681 in the menagerie of King Rajasinghe II of Kandy. Related to yaks and water buffalo, they are the largest of all wild cattle and out ranked in size by other land mammals only by elephants, rhinoceros, and hippopotamus.

5

THE HIPPOPOTAMUS

An ancient species of hippopotamus once lived in Sri Lanka - Hippopotamus Hexaprotodon Sinhaleyus. Dating back between 800,00 to 100,000 years ago, the fossilised remains of a its jawbone, showing the presence of a couple more teeth than exist in the current living hippopotamus (Hippopotamus amphibius), are all that is left to prove the once lively presence on Sri Lanka's rivers of this great land mammal, the largest after the elephant. It probably fell afoul of early climate change when rainfall become significantly less heavy, so putting pressure on their preferred habitat.

6

THE LION

The Sri Lankan lion is thought to have become extinct in 37,000 BCE. *Panthera Leo Sinhaleyus*, as the sub species is known, came to light in 1936 when P.E.P. Deraniyagala, uncovered two fossilized teeth in Kuruwita, near Ratnapura. With the passion of a forensic detection, the archaeologist studied his modest clutch of teeth. One was so damaged as to be of little use in identifying the animal, but the other, a left molar, presented so distinctive a structure as to not just twin it with lions, but set it apart from all known species too. From this single tooth, a lost sub species was uncovered, its size indicating that the beast was a lion much larger than the present Indian lion. Back in 37,000 BCE, Sri Lanka was a very different place to what it would become, an island of open grasslands a habitat perfect for lions. But over time, as the monsoon rainforest fuelled the proliferation of trees, its habitat become ever more restricted and at some point, the creature just died out.

7

THE PORCUPINE

Fossilised records from thousands of years ago show that the present porcupine - the Indian Crested Porcupine (*Hystrix Indica*) once had an ancestor similar though smaller to the one we find today - *Hystrix Sivalensis* Sinhaleyus.

8

THE RAT

The fossilized remains of *Tatera Sinhaleya*, bear witness to a rat that bade farewell to the island many thousands of years ago.

9

THE RHINOCERUS

Two subspecies of now extinct Rhinoceros -
Sinhaleyus & Kagavena - once lived in Sri
Lanka. Fossilized remains dating back 80,000
years found near Ratnapura by Dr. P.E.P.
Deraniyagala indicate their ghostly existence,
their marginally different teeth all that remains to
tell them apart and to distinguish them from the
Indian Rhinoceros (Rhinoceros Unicornis) that
once roamed Asia from Pakistan to China, and
who now are confined to a few protected
locations in Assam, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh,
and Nepal.

10 THE TIGER

Scant but intriguing fossil records reveal the existence of a Sri Lankan Tiger (*Panthera Tigris*). These telling fossils amount to a left lower tooth found near Ratnapura in 1962 and a sub-fossil of a paw bone dated back 16,500 years, found near Kuruwita. Tigers appear to have arrived in India some 12,000 years ago and spread from there to Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan. But it seems that it was not this Tiger sub species that wandered across the then existing land bridge from India to Sri Lanka – but another one altogether, one that was native to central Asia, eastern and northern China, Japan, northern Siberia, Sumatra, and Java.

11 THE WILD BOAR

Fossil records from thousands of years ago show the current wild boar were preceded by an endemic species one third smaller than they now are - *Sus Sinhaleyus*.

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A HISTORY LIKE NO OTHER

Contrary & creative, Sri Lanka built a tropical Versailles as the West constructed in wattle & daub. When the Cold War ebbed, its own began. The Ceylon Press *History of Sri Lanka* - in eBook and Podcast - unpicks its serpentine history.

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And least it gets too serious, enjoy the off-grid *Jungle Diaries* blog & Podcast; and *Archaeologies*, the blank verse diaries of an occasional hermit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, hermit, and writer.

He was born in Colombo and raised, with few concessions to modernity, in India, Singapore, and the Middle East. Cornish, he gained his degrees on the Celtic fringe: at the Universities of Wales, and Stirling, prolonging an introduction to accepted working hours for as long as was decently possible.

Having worked at News Corp's HarperCollins UK as board director for various otherwise homeless departments including sales, art and marketing; and HarperCollins India, he ran Hachette's consumer learning division. Prior to this, he launched Oxford University Press's first commercial online business, Oxford Reference Online.

When the doubtful charms of boardroom bawls, bottom lines, and divas diminished, he returned to Sri Lanka, the land of his birth hundreds of years earlier, to rescue a spice plantation and set of art deco buildings that had gone feral in the jungle.

Today, as The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, it has become one of the country's top ten boutique hotels, run by the kindest and most professional of hospitality teams; and overseen by several small schnauzers.

It also helps fund The Ceylon Press, set up to make Sri Lanka's rich and complicated story, a mystery to many, and a secret to most, more accessible. The Press' books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at theceylonpress.com. The Press also publishes Poetry from the Jungle, a podcast that recasts the orthodox view of the world's best poets and poems.

ABOUT THE FLAME TREE ESTATE & HOTEL

"It's absolute paradise," wrote one guest recently; "I would fly back to Sri Lanka simply to stay in this place for a couple more days."

Centered on a 25-acre organic spice and timber plantation, The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel has been renovated and furnished with art & antiques; its healthy menus fusing street food with fine dining.

Its 1,000 high rocky hills stalled the Dutch army in 1765; and until the civil war the estate stretched over 100 acres with 3 working elephants.

Today its restored plantations grow cardamom, turmeric, ginger, cloves, pepper, cocoa; rubber, coffee, vanilla; cinnamon, coconuts - and scores of trees from ebony to sapu – best enjoyed from the vantage point of the hotel's infinity pool. Visit www.flametreeestate.com.

It also houses and funds The Ceylon Press whose books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at theceylonpress.com.

A GIFT FOR READERS

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