

A CEYLON
PRESS TINY
GUIDE

A
CHECKLIST
TO THE 13
WILD CATS
OF SRI
LANKA

WILD CATS



1 THE CEYLON LEOPARD

Unlike other leopards, notably the ones that inhabit India, the Sri Lankan has no other rival predators, and this has inspired so great a degree of evolution that Sri Lanka's leopards are now considered to be a separate and quite distinct sub species, only to be found on the island. This lack of competition has probably helped account for their size - averaging six feet in length, head to tail, and weighing anything up to 220 pounds, making it larger than other leopard species. Solitary and with a life expectancy of around 15 years, it is also far less aggressive than others; and quite comfortable hunting through both day and night. It has a preference for the cooler highlands and has developed thicker fur and fat layers to stay warm. It is differentiated from other leopards too in its rosettes which are closer-set and smaller than any other species.

2

THE BLACK LEOPARD

An errant gene in the leopard population provides the rarest of leopards, the Black Leopard, of whom there have been only a few firm sightings. One in every three hundred leopards born has the propensity to be black.

3

THE SRI LANKAN LION

The Sri Lankan lion is thought to have become extinct in 37,000 BCE. *Panthera Leo Sinhaleyus*, as the sub species is known, only came to light in 1936 when two fossilized teeth were discovered near Ratnapura. From this 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. The National Flag aside, the lion lives on still in many a temple and ancient fortress, in statues and even biscuits and breweries.

4 THE SRI LANKAN TIGER

The discovery of a left lower tooth near Ratnapura in 1962 and a sub-fossil of a paw bone dating back 16,500 years revealed the lost existence of the Sri Lankan Tiger (*Panthera Tigris*). Tigers arrived in India 12,000 years ago and spread from there. But this 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.

5 THE CEYLON ASIATIC CHEETAH

The Ceylon Asiatic Cheetah was a distinctly different version of the Africa Cheetah and once roamed the world from Arabia and the Caspian to South Asia and Sri Lanka, until around ten thousand years ago. Today they are no longer found in Sri Lanka and in Asia their numbers are in steep decline.

6

THE JUNGLE CAT

The Jungle Cat (*Felis Chaus*) is thriving right across its distribution range – from Sri Lanka to China, the Middle East, to the Caucasus. Wholly sandy in colour, and roughly twice the size of the house cat, it lives its very solitary life feasting off birds and small animals, the hermit of the cat world. It has a variety of sub species, including one in Sri Lanka (*Felis Chaus Kelaarti*) but none so distinct as to excite cries for endemic status. It sticks to warmer locations within Sri Lanka but abounds in grassland and forest - whatever offers the greatest cover and food.

7

THE INDIAN FISHING CAT

Double the size of a domestic cat, and weighing up to almost 40 pounds, the Indian Fishing Cat is found in Sri Lanka and across South and Southeast Asia – but is increasingly vulnerable due to habitat loss. It has slightly webbed paws and, given its proclivity for fish, prefers to live around the island's wetlands, rivers, lake and stream banks, swamps, and mangroves. Its striking yellow grey fur displays confident black strips along the head and upper back that fray into dots and stipples further down the body. Its fur is specially layered to give it an extra barrier to water. Its lives up to ten years, with pregnancies lasting two months, after which two or three kittens are born.

8

THE RUSTY- SPOTTED CAT

The Rusty-Spotted Cat is the world's smallest wild cat, smaller even than most domestic cats and one of the least studied and understood of the wild cat species. Covered in reddish fur, it is found in dry forests and grasslands and is largely nocturnal, feasting off insects, small birds, rodents, frogs, and possibly small lizards as well as domestic fowl. They produce a litter of rarely more than three kittens after a two month pregnancy. Found only in Sri Lanka and India, their conservation status is threatened, with unending encroachments on its habitats fragmenting its home range.

9

THE ASIAN PALM CIVET

The Asian Palm Civet lives in generous numbers across Sri Lanka, South, and Southeast Asia. It is little more than five kilos in weight, its stocky body painted with gorgeous markings: grey fur with a white forehead, white dots under its eyes and beside its nostrils. Although primarily forest dwelling, it has acclimatised to urban life with alacrity, making its home in attics and unused civic spaces – and of course, palm plantations.

10 THE WET ZONE GOLDEN PALM CIVET

Similar in size and colour to other civets, it keeps to the rainforests. It emits a pleasant odour from its anal glands - described as reminiscent of magnolia flowers.

11 THE MONTANE GOLDEN PALM CIVET

Golden brown on its backs and lighter gold on its stomachs like all palm civets, the montane sub species is, to the trained eye, a little darker all round. From nose to bottom it measure 40 to 70 centimetres and weighs 3 to 10 pounds. Secretive, and forest loving creatures, it lives in tree hollows within the forested parts of the island.

12

THE DRY-ZONE PALM CIVET

Similar in size and colouring to other palm civets through the tail is often lighter than the body. It is found mainly in the dry zones of Sri Lanka.

13

THE SRI LANKAN
MOUNTAIN
PALM CIVET

Some scientists are now claiming that another civet also merits separate recognition: the Sri Lankan Mountain Palm Civet (*Paradoxurus supp*), found only in Dickoya.

DISCOVER MORE

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.

BEHIND EACH GREAT STORY

Island Stories: The Sri Lanka Podcast and the Press's *Complete Audio Books* explore the things that make Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan.

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The Ceylon Press's subject *Companions to Sri Lanka* makes visible the whole island – from its arts, wildlife, & landmarks to religion, food, & history.

A LITTLE LIGHT RELIEF

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

As a reader of this book, you naturally qualify for special treatment should your holiday ever bring you to Sri Lanka and The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel. Simply drop the general manager a note to tell him how you came across us and to make arrangements to best suit your time and budget:

GeneralManager@flametreeestate.com