

A CEYLON
PRESS TINY
GUIDE

A CHECKLIST
TO THE 11
RATS &
GERBILS OF
SRI LANKA

RATS & GERBILS



1 THE BLACK RAT

The Black Rat lives in all parts of Sri Lanka (and the world) and comes in at least five distinct sub species - the Common House-Rat Rat , the Egyptian House Rat, the Indian House Rat, the Common Ceylon House Rat, and the Ceylon Highland Rat. None are much longer than thirty-three centimetres nose to tail and despite their reputation for being black, also sport the occasional lighter brown fur. It is disconcertingly resilient transmitter for many diseases, its blood giving a home to a large quantity of infectious bacteria – including the bubonic plague.

2

BLANFORD'S RAT

Blanford's Rat, known also as White-Tailed Wood Rat, is found in impressive numbers throughout India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Measuring thirty-five centimetres in length nose to tail, it has classic grey fur.

3

THE BROWN RAT

The Brown Rat has been studied and domesticated more than most mammals and inhabits almost every continent of the world – not least Sri Lanka. It is large – over 50 centimetres nose to tail. It is happy to consume almost anything, is highly social, produces up to 5 litters a year and - according to the more informed scientists, is capable of positive emotional feelings.

4

THE CEYLON GERBIL

The sole island ambassador for a beast that boasts 110 species worldwide, the Ceylon Gerbil or Antelope-Rat is a distinct variant of the Indian Gerbil. Well distributed across the island, it lives in small colonies inside nests lined with dry grasses at the end of deep labyrinthine burrows. It is notably unneighbourly, aggressive and territorial with gerbils from other colonies. Like most gerbils it is exhaustively fertile, with pregnancies lasting under a month that produce up to nine young - who will themselves reach sexual maturity within four months. It is tiny - little more than 4 centimetres head to tail and clothed in brownish grey fur, all the better to pass unnoticed.

5

THE GREATER BANDICOOT RAT

Measuring almost sixty centimetres in length nose to tail, the Greater Bandicoot Rat lives right across South and Southeast Asia and for is known in Sri Lanka as the Pig Rat. Aggressive, highly fertile, widespread, and happy to eat practically anything, it is also an enthusiastic carrier of many diseases.

6 THE INDIAN BUSH RAT

The Indian Bush Rat is found widely across Sri Lanka and India – and even Iran. At twenty-five centimetres in length nose to tail, it is smaller than many other rats and has rather beautiful speckled yellow, black, and red fur.

7

THE INDIAN SOFT-FURRED RAT

The beautiful Indian Soft Furred Rat make its home at any altitude and almost any place from India, Nepal, and Pakistan to Sri Lanka. So ubiquitous and successful is it, that it lists as being of no concern whatsoever on the registers of environmentalists troubled by species decline. Barely 30 centimetres nose to tail, it has brown to yellow fur on its back and white across its tummy.

8

THE LESSER BANDICOOT RAT

The Lesser Bandicoot Rat measures 40 centimetres nose to tail. It is found in significant numbers throughout India and Sri Lanka. Its fondness for burrowing in the farmlands and gardens has earned it a reputation for destruction. It can be aggressive and is a reliable host to a range of nasty diseases including plague, typhus, leptospirosis, and salmonellosis.

9

THE NILLU RAT

The endemic Nillu Rat is highly endangered, and today found in restricted highland locations such as the Knuckles, Horton Plains, Nuwara Eliya, and Ohiya. Little more than thirty-nine centimetres length nose to tail, its fur is red grey

10 THE OHIYA RAT

Thirty centimetres in length, nose to tail, with steel grey fur and white undersides, the endemic Ohiya Rat is named after a small village near Badulla. It lives quietly in forests and has gradually become ever scarcer in counts done by depressed biologists.

11 TATERA SINHALEYA

Tatera Sinhaleya is a long-departed rat, known only from fossil records.

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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.

BEHIND EACH GREAT STORY

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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

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GeneralManager@flametreeestate.com