

## **TERROR AT THE PARK**

This incident I am about to tell you occurred on the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2007. I was eleven years into my career, having started out in 1996 as a Wildlife Guide, and now a Second-Grade Ranger stationed at the ‘Palatupana’ center at Yala National Park.

Every year, it is conventional practice to close Yala National Park to the public from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September to the 15<sup>th</sup> of October due to the drought season. Yet, officials are kept busy with the maintenance of ponds and roads, renovations and refurbishments of the several tourist bungalows situated in the park and conducting raids for poachers and other no-dowells.

Since the park was to be reopened to the public the following day, we left Palatupana center to restock the tourist bungalows. We set out on a ‘Land Rover Defender’, numbered 57-1462, as a small posse of five, consisting of Ranger Mr. Asanka Gunawardana, Wildlife Guard Mr. Mahendra Gamage, Finance Assistant Mr. B. M. J. Lakmal, Driver Mr. H. A. P. Chandana, and myself.

We stopped by the ‘Maha Seelawa’ tourist bungalow and the ‘Nawa Buthawa’ tourist bungalow and finally set out for the ‘Thalgasmankada’ tourist bungalow. At around 6:00 p.m., we were nearing our destination, having just passed by the tank known as ‘Darshana Wewa’ (also known as ‘Kota Bedi Wewa’), when we got word of a probable ambush at the bungalow by insurgents of the ‘LTTE’ (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam).

As soon as we turned the vehicle around to flee, we were peppered with a barrage of gunfire, followed by indistinguishable shouting from both us and our attackers. As my eyes adjusted to the creeping darkness around the thick forest, I was able to determine the obscure outlines of about 10 – 12 militants. Fortunately, we were able to reach the center office despite the gunfire. We got out of the Rover to find 13 bullet holes in the vehicle, but every one of us was alive and had managed to escape without any serious bodily harm.

Our relief in escaping a sure death was soured as we received information of the militants having murdered eight soldiers. They had also burned down the keeper’s house of the ‘Thalmasgankada’ bungalow, but both the keeper, Mr. K. L. Chandrasiri and assistant keeper, Mr. Jagath Themiyapala, had managed to escape by hiding in the dense, dark forest.

We counted our blessings for surviving this traumatic episode, but this attack was one of several the LTTE had executed in the Yala National Park over the years, until the end of the nearly 30-year long, brutal civil war in May 2009.

As the war reached its long-awaited end, I transferred to the legal section of the Colombo head office at the beginning of 2009. To this day, I still count my blessings, for it is nothing short of a miracle that I survived.

## **Dilip Dilantha Samaranyake**



Mr.Dilip Dilantha Samaranyake is currently working as the Park Warden of the Kumana National Park. He has worked in various National Parks in Sri Lanka. Yala, Udawalawe, Lunugamvehera, Wasgamuwa, Legal Division of the Head Office, Walawa Left Bank are some of the places where he has worked.

Mr.Dilip Samaranyake is a loving father of two sons, resides at Wellapitiya, Horana.

## **Yala National Park**

Renowned as a wildlife paradise, Yala National Park is one of the oldest wildlife sanctuaries in Sri Lanka. Although this park with an extent of 126786 hectares is less in size than Wilpattu Park, it is a land rich in biodiversity. Located in the southeastern part of Sri Lanka, Yala National Park is bounded on the north by the Uva Range, on the east and south by the Indian Ocean, on the West by a tributary of the Menik River and on the Kataragama mountain Range. Yala Sanctuary became a National Park on 25th February 1938 under the Fauna and Flora Protection Ordinance.

This national park is divided into five zones for administrative convenience.

Part 1 - 14101 Hectares - belongs to Hambantota District.

Part 11 - 9931 Hectares - belongs to Hambantota District.

Part 111- 40775 Hectares - belongs to Monaragala District.

Part 1V - 26418 Hectares - belongs to Monaragala District.

Part V - 6656 Hectares - belongs to Monaragala District.

In addition to these 5 sections, the Yala Strict Nature Reserve consists of 28905 hectares.



**A scenery from Yala Buthawa Bungalow**

The National Park which is located in two districts has diverse in annual rainfall and in the third, fourth and fifth zones belong to the Monaragala district receive rainfall of 550-775 mm whilst temperature there is 23 to 32 degrees Celsius. The first and second zones of the Hambantota district receive an annual rainfall of 400-500 mm.

The months from May to September are dry months, when the animals run out of water and food. During this time, wildlife is in dire need of rest, and during the peak of the drought,

September to October period, the park is closed to visitors. The park is generally known for its wet monsoon and dry monsoon forests and thorn bushes. Ecosystems include freshwater and marine wetlands, mangroves, and marine ecosystems such as coral reefs. Located in the lowest plains of the island, some parts of the park are as high as 100 m to 125 m above sea level. The Menik Ganga and Kumbukkan Oya, the 11th and 12th longest streams in Sri Lanka, also flow through the Yala Park. Several tanks including Vilapala Wewa, Gonagala Wewa, Mandagala Wewa, Uraniya Wewa, Mahaseelawa Wewa, Heenwewa and Korawakka Wewa are found there.

41 species of mammals, 133 species of endemic birds and 27 species of migratory birds have been recorded in the Yala National Park. Wild elephants, wild buffaloes and spotted deer can be easily spotted here. Wildlife is mostly found in the marine areas of the first zone. Zones 1 and 11 of the park are a leopard paradise.

Bears, sambar, mouse deer, small Indian civet, foxes, wild cats, monkeys and palm civets are some of the other animals that can be seen in this park. Close to the ocean star tortoise, lizards such as the oriental garden lizards, common green forest lizards, and near rivers and streams, salt water and marsh crocodiles can be found.



**Elephants**



**Spotted deer**



**Bear**

There is no shortage of water in this forest which has an environment conducive to the occasional nesting of migratory birds. There are about 20 lakes and lagoons avail here for aquatic birds and other animals. From September to March of this year of the following year, the migratory birds lodge in the surrounding and nearby sanctuaries.

Some migratory bird species make a permanent home here, such as the Black-necked stork. Black-necked stork is the largest bird among the 'Top 7 Wild Sri Lanka' animals published in Sri Lanka.

During the migratory periods, the common sandpipers, forest wagtails, flamingoes, black



**Black necked stork**

tailed godwits, Indian pittas, and the golden plovers are found. Spot billed pelican, Ceylon Jungle fowl, Srilanka spur fowl, lesser adjutant, pheasant tailed jacana, woolly necked stork, painted stork and several species of herons, bitterns and egrets can also be seen here.



**Blue tailed bee eater**



**Pea cock**



The second zone of the park has the least coverage of forest, but all other zones are covered with forests. The flora of Yala Park includes dry or semi-evergreen or thorny forests, wet deciduous forests, mangroves etc. Palu, Veera, Lunuwarana are the predominant plants and Ehela, Ranawara, Kohomba and wood apple plants are also widespread. Other species include Andara, Kukuruman, Heen Karamba, Eraminia, Hirasa, Kiri Vel, Wild Pichcha and Asparagus. About 300 species of plants have been identified in the first zone of the park alone.

It has been established that there were settlements associated with this forest in the past. The Pothana, Palatupana, Helawa, Okanda areas are villages where people lived in the past. Over time, these settlements became forests and became paradise of wildlife. There is a statue of the lord Buddha in a rock cave at the top of the hill belonging to the Magul Maha Vihara near Palatupana. There is also evidence that ancient Buddhist shrines were in a very advanced state at that time, according to ancient pottery ruins, Brahmi script, inscriptions, Buddha statues, etc. Inscriptions related to the reign of King Dutu Gemunu have been found near the Sithul Pawwa sacred ground. Pimbura gala Kanda, Gona Gala, Akasha Chaitya, Vihara Godella, Sithul Pawwa Rajamaha Vihara where the Arhat monks lived and the rock caves and Magul Vihara are still places of worship within the park. There are many historical stories and legends associated with Yala. Meanwhile, the stories related to Andre are very interesting.



**Yala entrance at Palatupana**



**Yala, New Buthawa Bungalow**

Divided for ease of administration, Yala Park has road facilities for tourists to visit. You have to enter Palatupana to watch the first part of Yala. This park is managed by the Park Headquarters located at Palatupana. 9.5 km from Tissamaharama town on the Colombo-Kataragama main road past Kirinda at the Palatupana main entrance is located. It is about

40 km from Kataragama to Katagamuwa, Sithulpawwa to Palatupana via Bambawa. Tourist lodges with all facilities have been constructed for tourists and accommodation should be reserved from the Department of Wildlife Conservation in Colombo. A tourist information center is also located at the entrance of the Yala National Park and a leopard Observation Center has recently been established in the park.



යාල පිළිබඳව විස්තරයේ ඇති වෘක්ෂයන්ගේ නම් ලැයිස්තුව

யால தொடர்பான விளக்கத்தில் காணப்படும் மரங்களின் பெயர்ப் பட்டியல்

# List of trees in the Yala documentary

Sinhala Names	Tamil Names	English Names	Botanical Name
පලු	பாலை	Ceylon Iron wood	<i>Manilkara hexandra</i>
වීර	வீரை	Hedge Boxwood	<i>Drypetes sepiaria</i>
ලුණුවරණ	மாவிலங்கம்		<i>Crateva adansonii</i> subsp. <i>odora</i>
ඇහැල	கொன்றை	Indian Laburnum, Shower of gold	<i>Cassia fistula</i>
රණවරා	ஆவாரம்	Matara Tea	<i>Senna auriculata</i> (Synonym- <i>Cassia auriculata</i> )
කොහොඹ	வேப்பம்	Margosa, Neem	<i>Azadirachta indica</i>
දිවුල්	விலா	Wood apple, Elephant apple	<i>Limonia acidissima</i>
අන්දර	பனை	-	Many species under family Fabaceae
කුකුරුමාන්	மலை மாதுளை	Spiny randia , Emetic - nut, False Guava	<i>Catunaregam spinosa</i>
හින් කරඹ	சிறு கிளா	-	<i>Carissa spinarum</i>
එරමිනියා	இலந்தை	-	<i>Ziziphus</i> species
හිරුසිස	வச்சிரவல்லி	Veld(t) grape	<i>Cissus quadrangularis</i>
කිරි වැල්	வெண் நுனா	-	Families Apocynaceae and Rubiaceae species
වල් පිව්ව	காட்டு மல்லிகை	-	<i>Jasminum</i> species
හාතලාරිය	சாதாவாரி	-	Family- <i>Asparagaceae</i>

යාල පිළිබඳව විස්තරයේ ඇති සතුන්ගේ නම් ලැයිස්තුව

யால தொடர்பான விளக்கத்தில் காணப்படும் விலங்குகளின் பெயர்ப் பட்டியல்

List of animals in the Yala documentary

Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
අලියා	யானைகள்	Asian elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>
වලසා	கரடிகள்	Sloth bear	<i>Ursus ursinus</i>
ගෝනා	மரைகள்	Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>
මීගන්නා	சருகு மான்கள்	Mouse deer	<i>Moscheola meminna</i>
කළුවැද්දා	ஆசிய மர நாய்கள்	Palm Civet	<i>Hermophroditus species</i>
උරලෑවා	புனுக்குப் பூனைகள்	Ring tailed civet	<i>Viverid species</i>
හීවලා	பொன்னிற குள்ள நரிகள்	Golden jackal	<i>Canis aureus</i>
වල් බළලා	காட்டு பூனைகள்	Jungle cat	<i>Felis chaus</i>
රිලවා	செங்குரங்கு	Toque monkey	macaca sinica sinica
ඉත්තෑවා	முள்ளம்பன்றிகள்	Porcupine	<i>Hystrix indica</i>
තාරකා ඉබ්බා	நட்சத்திர ஆமைகள்	Star tortoise	<i>Testudo elegans</i>
හැල කිඹුලා	சதுப்பு நில முதலை	Mugger crocodile	<i>Crocodylus palustris</i>
ගැට කිඹුලා	உவர் நீர் முதலை	Estuarine crocodile	<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>
ගරා කටුසීසා	தோட்டப் பல்லிகள்	Oriental garden lizard	<i>Calotes versicolor</i>
පලා කටුසීසා	பொதுவான பச்சை வன பல்லி	Common green forest lizard	<i>Calotes calotes</i>

Sinhala name	Tamil name	English name	Scientific name
අලිමානාලා	கருங்கழுத்து நாரை	Black-necked stork	<i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i>
කැළෑ හැලපෙන්නේදා	கொட்டிக்கால் வாலாட்டி	Forest wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>
සියක්කාරයා	பெரும் பூநாரை	Greater flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>
අළු පැස්තුඩුවා	சாம்பல் நாரை	Spot-billed pelican	<i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>
පෙද කළු ගොහොඳු වින්නා	கருவால் மூக்கன்	Black tailed godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>
අවිච්චියා	இந்திய தோட்டக் களளான்	Indian pittah	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
බිඞුහරයා	நீலவால் பஞ்சருட்டான்	Bee eater	<i>Merops species</i>
මහාරත් ඔලෙවියා	கல்பொறுக்கி	Golden plover	<i>Pulvialis fulva</i>
පාදිලිමානාලා	வெண்கழுத்து நாரை	Woolly necked stork	<i>Ciconia episcopus</i>
ලකු වැකියා	மஞ்சள் மூக்கு நாரை	Painted stork	<i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>
කොකා විශේෂ	சாம்பல் நாரை வகை	Heron species	<i>Ardea species</i>
කොකා විශේෂ	பெரிய கொக்கு வகை	Egret species	<i>Egretta species</i>
කොකා විශේෂ	மஞ்சள் குருகு வகை	Bittern species	<i>Ixobrychus species</i>
සැවුල්පෙද දියසැනා	நீளவால் இலைக் கோழி	Pheasant tailed jacana	<i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>
බහුරු මානාලා	சிறிய பெரு நாரை	Lesser adjutant	<i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>
වළි කුකුලා	இலங்கைக் காட்டுக் கோழி	Ceylon jungle fowl	<i>Gallus lafayetti</i>

හමන් කුකුලා	சின்னக் காட்டுக் கோழி	Sri Lanka spurfowl	<i>Galloperdix bicalcarata</i>
සිලිබිල්ලා	பொதுவான புள்ளிச் செங்கால் உள்ளான்	Shanka and Sand pipers	<i>Tringa Species</i>

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