

# Opening of Renovated Popham Arboretum as an Eco Tourism Destination for the Nature Lovers

20 July 2023 , Dambulla

## Medial Note:

NIFS-Popham Arboretum is situated about two and half kilometres away from Dambulla by the Kandalama road. This unique site was owned by an Englishman, Mr. F. H. (Sam) Popham, who gifted it to NIFS in 1989 to carry out research and educational activities.

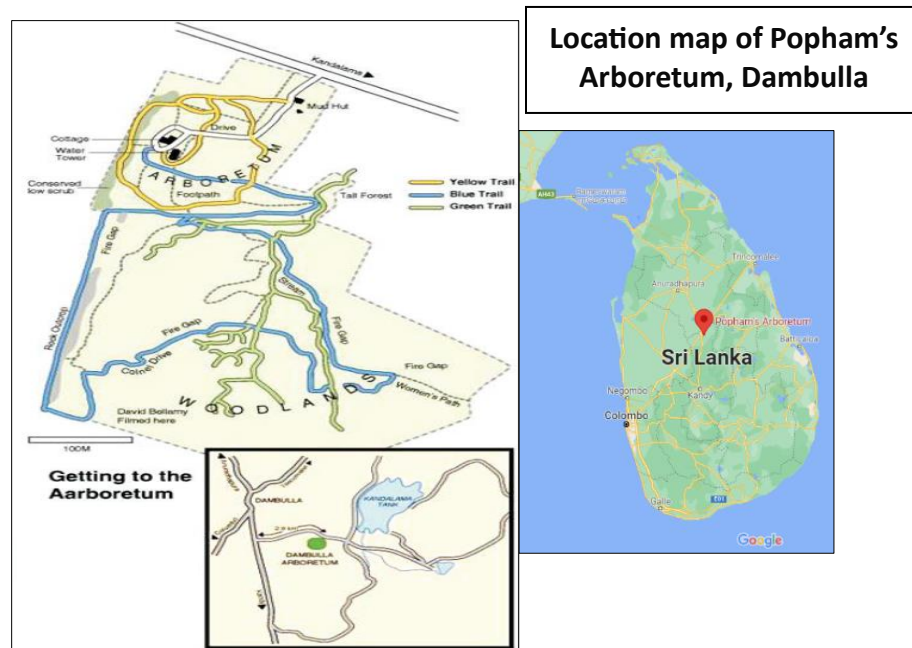
Original site bought by Popham in 1963 was a seven and half acre-scrub jungle. Popham allowed the indigenous tree saplings in the site to emerge and establish by removing the 'weedy' shrubs around them. Consequently, the original scrub jungle was turned into a tall woodland with a closed canopy. After taking over the land in 1989, NIFS bought and added another 27 acres of adjoining scrub land and expanded the arboretum. Popham's method of "Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR)" was practiced.

***(Note: NIFS- National Institute of Fundamental Studies)***

## **The Arboretum and Tourist's attraction:**

This arboretum is visited by many local and overseas researchers for educational purposes and ecological research. It is also a popular tourist destination owing to the presence of unique fauna such as Slender Loris, Pangolin and a rich vegetation consisting of over 300 species of plants.

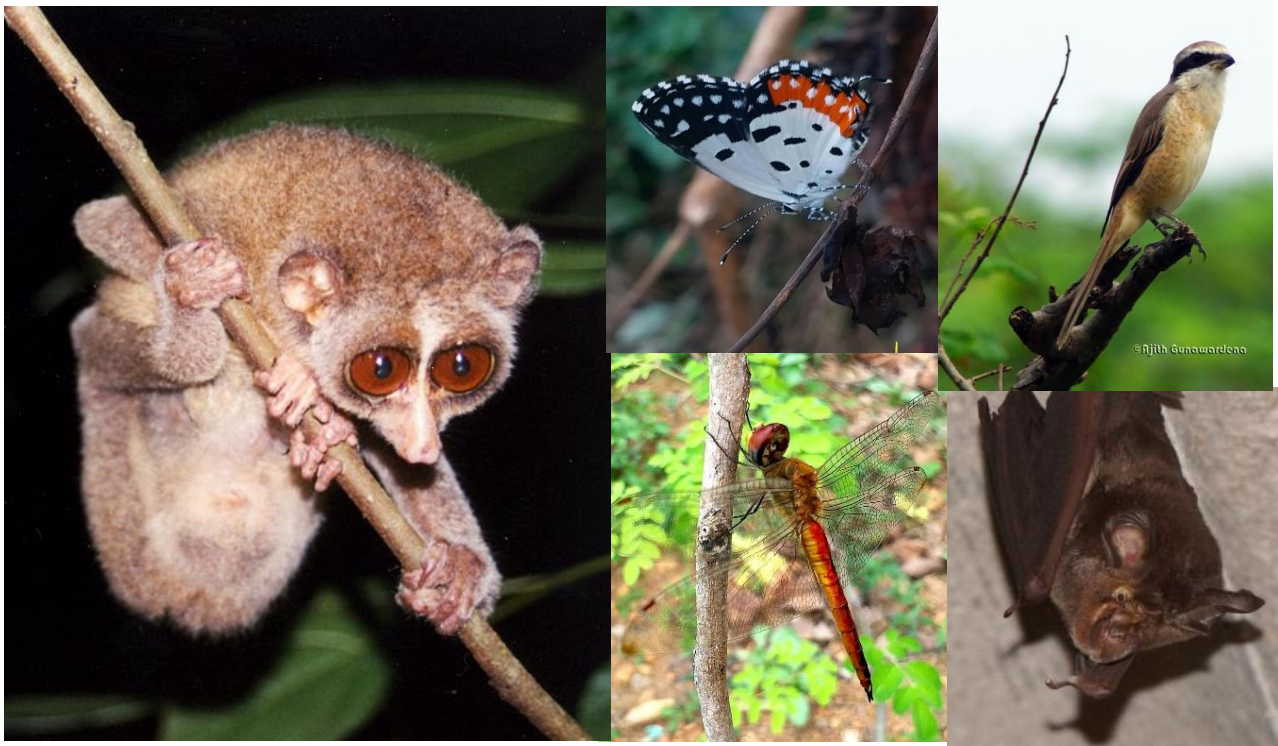
It is located in between Kandalama Hotel and Dambulla town on the Kandalama Dambulla road. This is an ideal place for the foreign tourists to visit and spend some time in a very peaceful cool environment. Furthermore, following factors, facilities and available activities are the key factors important for tourist attraction.



## Eco Tourism Potentials in the site:

### ***High diversity of Fauna***

This Arboretum serves as a home to a variety of animals and birds. Within the premises, a wide variety of bird species such as endemic jungle fowl, grey hornbill, brown capped babbler, blue faced malkoha, blue tailed bee-eater, paradise flycatcher and some unique animals like slender loris and pangolin can be seen. Popham arboretum is also known for its variety of butterflies and dragonflies. 25 species of mammals including bats, 83 species of birds including some migrants 77 species of butterflies and 12 species of dragonflies have been recorded to be residing in the arboretum. Also, this is the popular destination for Gecko Watching of high end nature based tourists.



### ***Flora at Arboretum:***

NIFS Popham Arboretum functions as a restoration site for several valuable and endangered indigenous plant species. Some common trees found within the area are Ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*), Satinwood (*Chloroxylon swietenia*), Halmilla (*Berrya cordifolia*), Hulanhik (*Chukrasia tabuensis*) and Mee (*Madhuca longifolia*). Several valuable trees and shrubs with medicinal value are also found here. Some of them are: Neem, Bo-mee, Ankenda, Na and Ratmal. The arboretum is home to about 100 species of timber trees and about 70 species of medicinal plants. Altogether there are over 350 plants species belonging to 83 families with herbs, climbers and parasites.

This arboretum encompasses a very high tree density with a closed canopy cover while offering a very cool microclimate. Forest bathing is one of the very popular concepts of originated in Japan and it is scientifically proved with many health benefits. As a dry zone forest, there is a very high potential to develop this location as “forest bathing” and ultimately it will lead to generate more income from the tourists.



## Activities Available for Visitors in the Arboretum:

- **Day Safari at Popham Arboretum**

This arboretum is well established with properly guided nature trails and Visitors can walk through all nature trails without any assistance. Four nature trails (Green trail, blue trail, pink trail and yellow trail) have been set up for day time walks. These trails are marked and well maintained with colour bands and numbered arrows for self-navigation around the arboretum. Day walks are ideal for bird and butterfly watching, viewing forest trees & mushroom and for a forest bathing experience.



- **Night Safari at Popham Arboretum**

Night safaris mainly focus on Grey Slender Loris (*Loris lydekkerianus*) and Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) watching. Walks are arranged with a tour guide and is open from 7.00 pm to 10.00 pm. This activity is very popular among the nature lovers and it helps to get additional income to the country.



- **Camping at Popham Arboretum**

The arboretum is having a very attractive camp site which is in a nicely designed location, adjacent to a stream which provide water at least 10 months of the year. A camp site is available for a maximum of 25 people. Two washrooms with toilets and bathrooms are available for visitors. Campers can hire tents, or can use their own tents for camping. Barbecue facilities are also available in the camp site. The camping site is available for interested parties through prior reservations.





### **Lodging at Popham Arboretum**

Rooms are available for accommodation. Three rooms with ensuites are available for overnight stay. The extra-large room can accommodate 05, large room can accommodate 03, and small room can accommodate 02 people respectively.



## Research at the Popham Arboretum

Depending on the researcher's interest, projects can focus on dry zone vegetation, restoration ecology, animal behaviour, microorganisms, carbon sequencing and taxonomic studies on flora and fauna.



Considering the importance of the site, the Ministry of Environment has identified this site as one of the sites which will be developed for promoting ecotourism mainly targeted for foreign tourists.

Accordingly, Ministry of Environment has provided funds to National Institute of Fundamental Studies to develop following activities (improve the facilities) in the site:

- Construct 10' x 10' ticket counter at the entrance
- Establish name board at the main entrance
- Renovate fence in an environment friendly manner
- Improve facilities for the open lecture area
- Improve the outdoor conference facilities with furniture arrangements
- Establish Popham museum
- Prepare high quality information booklet specially target for foreign tourists & develop a video documentary

- Renovate trail Directions
- Construct new toilets and renovate existing toilet facilities

National Institute of Fundamental Studies (NIFS) has completed the work and today we are gathering here to re-open the site as an Eco Tourism Destination. Hon. Naseer Ahamad, Minister of Environment, Hon. Susil Premajayantha, Minister of Education, and the Secretaries of the two Ministries and the Additional Secretaries, Board Members of the NIFS and other invitees join with us today for this re-opening ceremony.

This type of innovations are very much valuable to earning foreign currency to the country and popularize the country's beauty to the world.