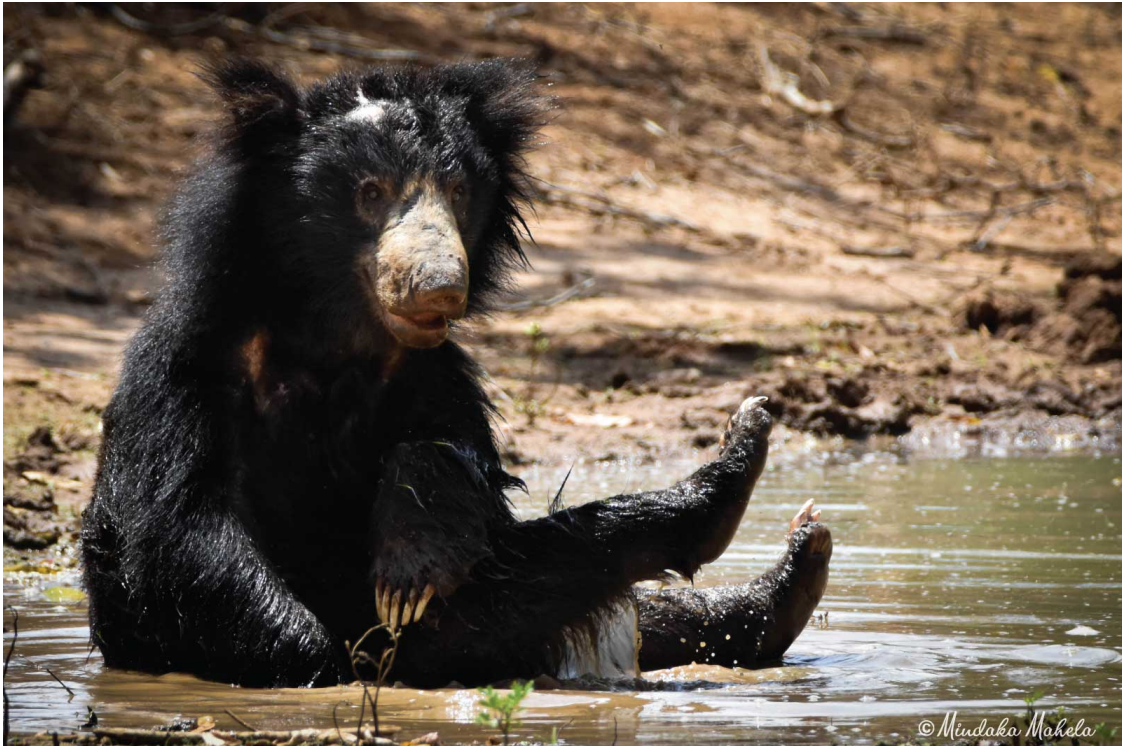


Ceylon Wilderness Digest



Sri Lankan sloth bear (Melursus ursinus inornatus)
Yala National Park
Photography by Mindaka Mahela

The misunderstanding which turned a bear into a sloth

Fun Facts

There isn't a funnier origin story of how animals were named, than the story of the Sloth bear! Originally classified as belonging to the sloth family in the 1700s, thus named Bear sloth, Baloo was finally recognised as a bear when he was shipped to Europe from India in 1810! The Bear sloth thus became the Sloth bear, along with the discovery of a few more 'bear necessities'. Similar to his cousin Winnie, all sloth bears love their honey, and much like the classic Pooh Bear cartoons, these bears also climb trees to knock down hives, then greedily gobble up the honey whilst making yummy noises like gurgling and humming as they suck their paws clean!

Did you know?

Sloth mama bears are the only species of their kind to give their cubs piggy-back rides! Also being the bear that never hibernates, they use their caves to give birth instead, where gestation lasts for about 210 days. When feeding their cubs, mama bears regurgitate a mixture of half-digested jackfruit, wood apples, and pieces of honeycomb. This hardens into a form of 'bear bread' which is then fed to her cubs, and also considered a delicacy by some of India's natives!

Whereabouts

The Sri Lankan Sloth Bear is found mainly living in the lowland dry forests and the rainforests of the central hills of Sri Lanka.





Sri Lankan Giant Squirrel (Ratufa macroura, Ratufa macroura dandolena, Ratufa macroura melanochra)
Wilpattu National Park
Photography by Mindaka Mahela

The chilled out and slightly deaf ninja squirrel of Sri Lanka

Fun Facts

When Sri Lankan giant squirrels aren't in ninja mode, you can find them chilling out spread-eagled on a shady tree branch! However, their true ninja prowess can be observed through watching them nail the long jump of 6m between trees, flatten themselves against a branch to hide, or remain completely motionless like a master ninja. Although their sense of hearing is relatively poor, their vision makes up for it, making them exceptional at predator recon!

Did you know?

Unlike their bushy-tailed relatives, the giant squirrel balances using its two hind feet, instead of its tail. Known to be a recluse (a price all professional rodent ninjas pay), Giant squirrels rarely leave their tree hideouts and only come down for necessities – being chased by a predator, to attack other males encroaching on their territory, or for love.

Whereabouts

Sri Lankan Giant Squirrels are found in the Central and Uva Hills, Nuwara Eliya, including Horton Plains and the Peak Wilderness.



Mugger Crocodile (Crocodylus palustris)
Udawalawe National Park
Photography by Mindaka Mahela

Memoirs of a mugger crocodile housewife

Fun Facts

"I know I'm not as big as my saltie cousin, but where I lack in brawn, I make up for in brains! I'm one of the first reptiles to use culinary tools, by setting traps for birds. My easy dinner recipe for quick water bird is quite famous with my family and especially good around the nesting holiday season; just balance sticks and branches on your head to lure birds looking for nesting material and voila! Instant, freshly-caught bird! Works every time! I do have a family recipe for deer as well – leave it to rot for a few days, while wedged underwater, before pulling it apart. It's all about getting that right texture – I personally call it croc sous vide."

“My name – Mugger – is actually a corruption from an Indian word that means ‘water monster’! Although technically speaking, I’m a living dinosaur, unchanged over 65 million years. In today’s world, my general lifespan usually guarantees I make it to my 40th birthday. Although if you’re talking about having kids, 40 years is much too late! The females of my species reach sexual maturity around 6.5 years. Having a good nest is so important these days as well, as the temperature of the nest determines whether I’ll have sons or daughters! If the nest is about 32.50°C the babies will all be male, but going higher or lower makes them all female! This is why it’s all about location, location, location.”

Whereabouts

“I like living in freshwater lakes, rivers and marshes, and prefer slow-moving, shallow water bodies across Sri Lanka, most notably at Wilpattu, Yala and Bundala. Sometimes I move to artificial reservoirs and irrigation canals as a change of pace.”





Spot-billed pelican (Pelecanus philippensis)
Kumana National Park
Photography by Mindaka Mahela

The art of pelican seduction and general community integration

Fun Facts

Before a Spot-billed pelican can become a family bird, they need to prove they're good dancers as a marital prerequisite! This courtship solo dance involves males to puff up their pouch and use swinging motions and head-bobbing, followed by a hip-hop finale of tilting their head backwards! However, once they seal the deal, they prefer privacy for any verbal domestic disputes – the equivalent of “we’ll talk about it when we get home”. After being silent in public, they hiss, grunt or snap their bills back at their nest!

Did you know?

Spot-billed pelicans were once used by fishermen in parts of eastern Bengal as decoys, as it was believed an oily secretion from this bird attracted certain fish! However, in Sri Lanka, these pelicans are the ones doing most of the fishing, usually as a flock. They thrive on being part of a diverse feathered community, as usually

Whereabouts

The Spot-billed pelican is a common breeding resident in tanks, lagoons and marshlands of the low-country dry zone. Birds originally released from the National Zoological Gardens of Sri Lanka in Dehiwala have established breeding colonies in and around Colombo's marshy areas and wet zones.

