

**Research Activity Report**  
**Supported by “Leading Graduate Program in Primatology and Wildlife Science”**  
 (Please be sure to submit this report after the trip that supported by PWS.)

2015.08.28

<b>Affiliation/Position</b>	Primate Research Institute/D1
<b>Name</b>	Liesbeth FRIAS

<b>1. Country/location of visit</b>
Sri Lanka/ Colombo, Sinharaja, Madu Ganga, Hikkaduwa, Bundala, Kataragama, Yala, Handapanagala, Ohiya, Horton Plains, Trincomalee
<b>2. Research project</b>
International Training Program on Terrestrial & Aquatic Wildlife & Primate Conservation
<b>3. Date (departing from/returning to Japan)</b>
2015.07.31 – 2015.08.17 (18 days)
<b>4. Main host researcher and affiliation</b>
Dr. Charmalie Nahallage & Dr. Kamal Ranathunga (Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Sri Jayewardenepura Nugegoda, Sri Lanka), Michael Huffman (KU Primate Research Institute)
<b>5. Progress and results of your research/activity</b> (You can attach extra pages if needed)
Please insert one or more pictures (to be publicly released). Below each picture, please provide a brief description.
<p>The First International Training Program on Terrestrial &amp; Aquatic Wildlife &amp; Primate Conservation was held between August 2<sup>nd</sup> and August 15<sup>th</sup>. The main goals were to visit and experience the different habitats, to get familiar with the current wildlife management and conservation issues in the country, and to experience Sri Lankan history and culture.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p><b>Schedule</b></p> <p>Day 1-2: Colombo</p> <p>Day 3-4: Sinharaja</p> <p>Day 5: Madu Ganga</p> <p>Day 6: Hikkaduwa</p> <p>Day 7: Bundala</p> <p>Day 8: Katharagama</p> <p>Day 9: Yala</p> <p>Day 10: Handapanagala</p> <p>Day 11: Ohiya</p> <p>Day 12: Horton Plains</p> <p>Day 13-14: Trincomalee</p> <p>Day 15-16: Colombo</p> </div> </div>

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For the opening of the program, we had a nice reception at the Golden Rose in Boralessgamuwa. It started with the lighting of the traditional oil lamp, symbolizing a new beginning. Students of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura performed traditional dances and we had the first set of lectures, introducing the faunal and floral diversity in Sri Lanka, their primates, and research in aquatic ecosystems (fig. 1). On the next day, we headed to Sinharaja Forest Reserve, a national park located in the wet zone of Sri Lanka (fig. 2). It's a biodiversity hotspot with Sri Lanka's last remnants of primary tropical lowland rainforest; over 60% of tree species are endemic and many of these are considered rare. Faunal endemism is also high, with 95% of all endemic birds recorded here. Among the birds we saw, the most striking were the blue magpie and the jungle fowl, both endemic to Sri Lanka, and the latter being also the national bird. While talking to people there, I was told that the literal meaning of Sinharaja was “lion king” and referred to the forest of the “lion-people” of Sri Lanka.

Next stop was Madu Ganga, a coastal wetland ecosystem that supports several species of fish, birds, reptiles and mammals (fig. 3). During our boat trip we saw water monitors, purple-faced langurs and kingfishers. We stopped at a couple of islets to experience doctor fish treatment, a practice where the fish take dead skin off your feet, and to see how peeled cinnamon is produced locally. After that we headed to Kosgoda, to learn about the sea turtle conservation project that protects Sri Lankan turtles from extinction. The hatchery collects and rescues eggs so that they can hatch safely away from predators; after hatching, they are kept in pools for a few days before being released into the sea. On the next day we visited Hikkaduwa's fringing coral, where the presence of visitors has increased coral's degradation over the years. We were told that this once was an astonishing place, but now most of the coral is dying. Degradation has been due to both natural and human activities. Besides coral bleaching, the 2004 tsunami caused further damage by depositing debris on the reef. Tourism is also a big problem, with visitors walking on the reef, collision of glass bottom boats with the reef, and pollution.

During our visit to the dry zone, we took safari tours to two National Parks. The first one was Bundala, an important place for migratory birds in Sri Lanka, with more than 200 bird species recorded in the park. It also hosts a large diversity of mammals, among the ones we saw, there were Asian elephants, toque macaques, langurs, jackals, wild boars, spotted deer and water buffaloes (fig. 4). The second one was Yala (fig. 5), the second largest national park in Sri Lanka and well known for its rich wildlife and conservation of elephants, leopards and aquatic birds. Yala has been the center of past civilizations, evidenced by a large number of tanks from the hydraulic and agricultural civilization dating back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. In 2004, the Indian Ocean tsunami caused severe damage to the park and around 250 people died.

Afterwards we moved to Kataragama, a pilgrimage town sacred to Sinhala Buddhists, Hindu Sri Lankan Tamils, Sri Lankan Moors and Vedda (Sri Lanka's hunter-gatherers), that contains a shrine dedicated to the guardian deity in Sri Lanka. We visited this place to observe how primates and humans come together in this temple. We saw several groups of grey langurs; in Sri Lanka they are restricted to lowland dry and arid regions, mainly in the north, east and southeast areas of the country. In a study led by Dr. Nahallage in 2008, it was reported that the grey langur was the most commonly seen primate species in national parks and surrounding areas. They were described

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as more habituated to humans and easier to see in Buddhist and Hindu temples, where they are partially provisioned by people.



Fig. 1. Students of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura performing traditional Sri Lankan dances (top); fantastic dinner after inauguration ceremony at Golden Rose (bottom left); Dr. Charmalie Nahallage giving us an introduction to Sri Lankan primates (bottom right). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias.



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Fig. 2. Members of the program heading to Sinharaja (top left); Prof. Sarath Kotagama showing us the different plant species in the reserve (top right); Sri Lankan blue magpie (middle left); Sri Lankan jungle fowl (middle right); Prof. Gunathilake talking about forest coverage (bottom left); leeches were present both days so we had many “de-leeching” sessions during our visits to the forest (bottom middle); frog eggs embedded in foam that provides shelter from predators, bacteria and sunlight (bottom right). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias, Mohamed Atheeq (bottom middle).



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Fig. 3. Madu Ganga (top); local production of cinnamon (middle left); doctor fish treatment (middle right); water monitor (middle center); deformed turtles kept at Kosgoda (bottom left); turtle hatchery (bottom right). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias.



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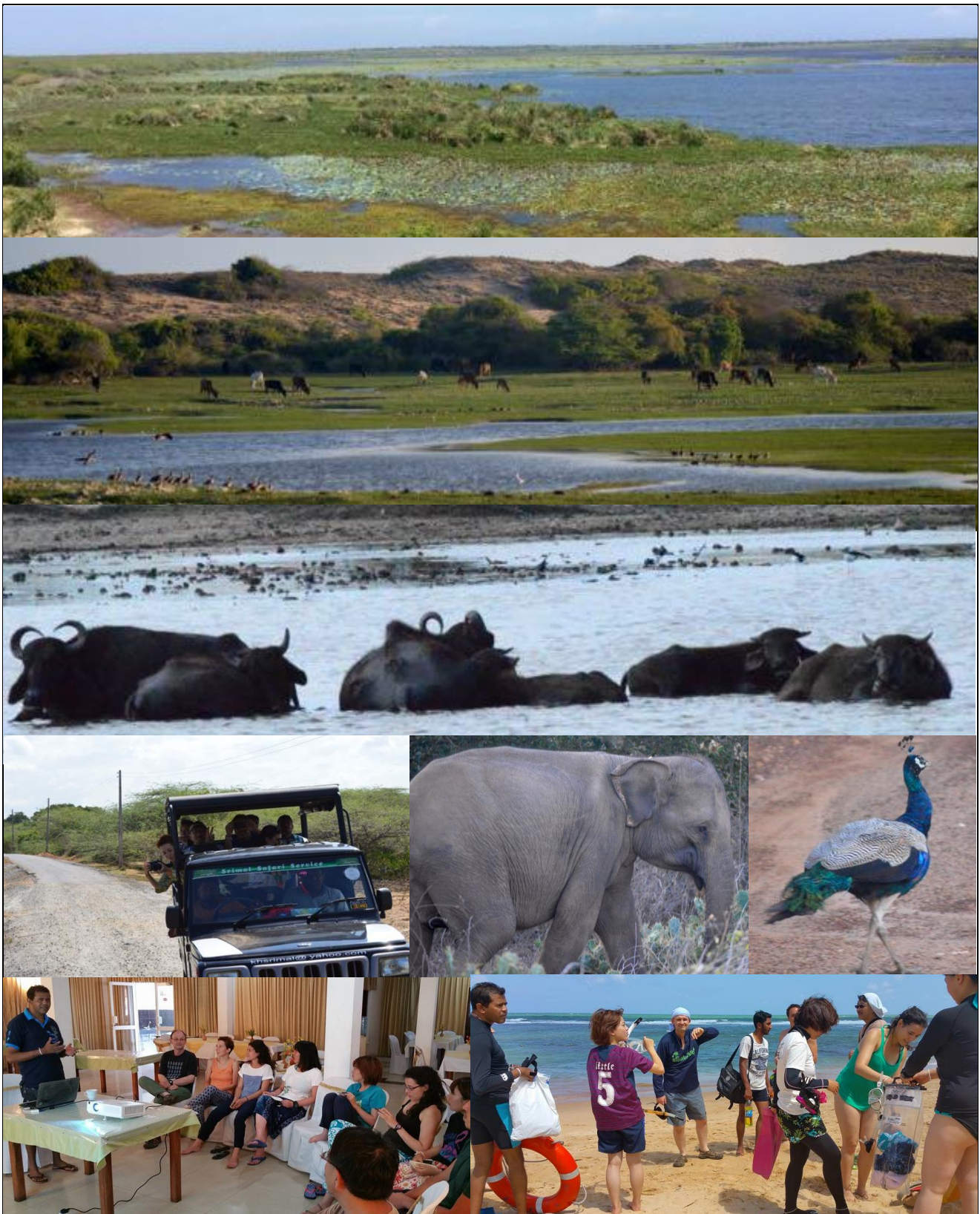


Fig. 4. Bundala National Park; water buffaloes (center); jeep tour (middle left); Asian elephant (middle center); peacock (middle right); lecture on coral reef morphology and formation by Dr. Kamal Ranatunga (bottom left); the team getting ready for snorkeling at Hikkaduwa (bottom right). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias, Mohamed Atheeq (bottom left), ITP 2015 (bottom right).



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Fig. 5. Yala National Park. Water buffalo (top left); langur (top right); wild boars (middle); Patanangala, a rock formation in Yala beach that saved the life of people that managed to climb there during the 2004 tsunami. Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias.



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Fig. 6. Kataragama's tusker has been carrying the casket of Kataragama for 20 years. He broke both his tusks trying to ram them into a tree trunk a few years ago and since a piece of them broke, he now wears sheaths of copper to protect them from further damage (top left); devotees at the entrance of Kataragama temple (top right); Buddhist monk and devotees coming back from the temple (middle); langurs aggregating under a tree (bottom). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias.



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In Ohiya we had a day off to prepare for a small symposium (fig. 8). Each of us chose a topic learnt during the first part of the trip and gave a short lecture about it. My topic was about human-elephant conflict in Sri Lanka (fig. 7). Sri Lanka has an important position in relation to Asian elephant conservation. More than 10% of the global Asian elephant population lives in less than 2% of elephant range, which makes Sri Lanka the country with the highest density of elephants in the world. Sri Lankans also have a very close association with elephants. Elephant motifs have been used in art since ancient times. Elephants also hold a central position in the country’s two main religions: Buddhism and Hinduism. They are considered as a symbol of physical and mental strength, intelligence, good luck and prosperity. The major threat to elephants is habitat loss and fragmentation through conversion to settlements, commercial agriculture and irrigation or small water reservoirs. All of these activities increase conflict. On the human side, elephants destroy crops, knock down trees, damage houses and at times even kill people.

At Ohiya we visited Horton Plains National Park (fig. 8), located in the highlands of Sri Lanka and consisting of montane grassland and cloud forest. Samba deer is the most common mammal there and the park harbors a large number of bird species endemic to Sri Lanka and restricted to Horton Plains. Our last visit in Sri Lanka was to Pigeon Island National Park (fig. 9), a place with one of the best remaining coral reefs in the country and an important breeding ground for the rock pigeon, bird that gives the name to the island. While snorkeling we had the chance to see many different species of corals and coral reef fish, including the blacktip reef shark.

This course was extremely well organized and very nicely planned. In two weeks we crossed the whole country, from the wet zone to the dry zone, passing through the mountains and coral reefs. We got the chance to visit important places in the company of experts in the field, learning something new every day and taking with us a lot more than amazing pictures. Sri Lanka is a wonderful place, diverse in many ways. I’m grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in this program.

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Fig. 7. Begging elephant (top left); electric fence used to keep wild elephants inside of protected areas (top right); electric fence knocked down by an elephant (middle left); tree house used for crop guarding (middle right); team heading to a water reservoir used regularly by elephants (bottom). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias.



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Fig. 8. Toque macaque (top left) and members of the team watching the monkeys on our way to Ohiya (top right); presentations about human-elephant conflict (middle left) and coral reef degradation at Hikkaduwa (middle right); samba deer (bottom left); Horton Plains (bottom right). Photo credit: Liesbeth Frias, Mohamed Atheeq (middle left and right).



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Fig. 9. Last day at Trincomalee and closing ceremony at the Golf Link Hotel (top); Pigeon Island (bottom left); Hindu temple on our way back to Colombo (bottom right). Photo credits: Mohamed Atheeq (top), Josue Alejandro Pastrana (bottom left), Liesbeth Frias (bottom right).

### Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude to PWS and Prof. Matsuzawa for supporting this field course. Special thanks to the local organizers, Dr. Charmalie Nahallage and Dr. Kamal Ranatunga, Prof. Swarna Piyasiri, Dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies, and Prof. Sampath Amaratunga, Vice Chancellor of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura. To the invited speakers, Prof. Sarath Kotagama and Prof. Devaka Weerakoon, from the University of Colombo; Prof. Nimal Gunathilaka, Prof. Arjan Rajasuriya, Prof. UKG Padmalal, Dr. Enoka Kudawidanage, Dr. Sisira Ediriweera and Dr. Turney Pradeep Kumara. I would also like to thank Mohamed Atheeq and Vidyani Lakshika, for their company during the trip, taking care of us during all times and showing us how amazing Sri Lankan culture is. To Nihal Perera, our driver, for introducing us to Hindi music and patiently listening to the same 3 songs during the whole trip. To Raveendra Withanachchi for showing us the city on the first day and the Physical Anthropology Lab (University of Sri Jayewardenepura) at the end of the trip. To Prof. Mike Huffman for sharing with us his vast knowledge and experience in Sri Lankan history, culture and wildlife, and to Tanaka-sensei for providing us with music throughout the trip. Finally, to the wonderful ITP 2015 team members. This experience will be memorable because of the presence of every one of you... thank you!