



# Jungle Telegraph

*Newsletter from the Wildlife and Nature Protection Society*

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## NEWS:

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## Wildlife and Nature Protection Society

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## The Decades Roll on

*A message from the President*

Famed naturalist David Attenborough gives us a very humble and sobering testament in his latest heartwarming TV biography "A Life on Our Planet" where we see the grim predictions of what could happen if we were to continue our relentless assault on Mother Earth. Human greed and selfishness have been limitless and our commercial world gladly promotes it as the signs of success and modern enlightenment. Concentration of global wealth has never been so unjustified as today, and we see more marginalised communities impacting the environment in their efforts to simply survive. At the other end, greedy businessmen and corrupt politicians lead the charge to acquire, destroy, sell or exploit every possible natural resource in Sri Lanka, with not a single pause to ponder any alternative future in a more planned sustainable manner. Will the new Constitutional Amendments pave the way for further ad-hoc decisions, legislation change and acceleration of the degradation of our natural resources, small forest patches, mangroves and more? Or will it bring about strong new environmental legislation which is visionary and future-proof? Time will tell but no one is living in great hope, unfortunately.

Can COVID-19 be the great leveler for Humanity? Will it push the world towards a realisation that we can manage without much of what we think we need, or that we are one in humanity, and if anyone has a problem, it could become our collective problem? Can we restore sanity and manage with less, which will then reduce the pressure on our natural environment and potentially ease the destruction? Will it be nature that finally saves nature, and not mankind with our pseudo enlightened mindset and science? It certainly looks like there is a small window of opportunity to give nature some time to recoup. David Attenborough goes on to showcase small examples where the Earth can also rebuild if given the chance. The question is, will we support and enable it further as an outcome of COVID-19, or will we simply get back to our terrible ways of abusing the Earth?

The WNPS team has been hard at work within the limitations we face. We are fighting to keep our programmes going online, while some of the field related work is majorly hampered. We managed to do some activities in remote locations through our Youth Wing and Regional Reps, while our HEC Subcommittee members were often in the field meeting partners and farmers in the quest for easing that tension. We squeezed out an excursion or two and have been doing some fantastic engagement on the Marine Subcommittee side to fight back on some of the recent destructive moves. Our fundraising efforts have been significantly challenged, and we sincerely request more people contribute online, on our website to help us keep up the momentum.

Despite these limitations, our ambitions are lofty as always and we have just undertaken a major renovation of the Yala Bungalow, raised additional funds to cover all the DWC folks with our Insurance programme, are donating some new cages to the DWC for leopard transportation, and are getting things up and running when it comes to the PLANT initiative. The reforestations programmes continue and while Loris was published fully electronically, we will continue to forge ahead on as many fronts as possible. I am fortunate to have a great team who continue to selflessly give their best towards the cause of conservation.

I wish we had good news to share on the conservation battles, but frankly we are just barely managing to keep some powerful forces at bay with each new twist and turn. Under-resourced, barely funded but still passionate, let us continue to give it our best shot, and I encourage everyone to not just stay safe but think about the greater good before engaging in travel and activities. Low park visitation in places like Yala might even cause the shakeout of surplus employment that was bleeding the park dry, and we might see the emergence of a better sustainable balance at the other end of the tunnel. Certainly, the work from home and electronic friendly business approach is easing a lot of fuel consumption, pollution and more. The months ahead will be key as we battle COVID-19 and we once again thank all those at the forefront of this exercise to keep the nation safe.

**Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne**  
President





## UPDATE: Legal cases

WNPS together with EFL has instituted a number of legal actions to prevent harmful actions and imminent threats against wildlife.

### The Pallenkandal Church Case

Pallenkandal Church Festival case was one of the main focuses of WNPS in terms of preventive actions. In this matter WNPS and EFL as co-petitioners filed a writ application in the Court of Appeal against carrying out illegal festive activities by a church inside the Wilpattu National Park. These church festivities have caused disruptions to wildlife and increased human intrusion inside the park. However, unfortunately the Court dismissed the case due to a technical error contained in the Petition. Nevertheless, WNPS along with EFL are planning to continue the fight and are currently exploring other options of filing a fresh action in court in this regard.

### National Elephant Conservation Policy

Steps were taken to file a case against the decision taken by the Cabinet of Ministers approving the issuance of 2000 firearms to be distributed to personnel of the Civil Defence Force (CDF) deployed/living in areas rife with human elephant conflict. The writ application filed by WNPS against the issue of firearms to the CDF on the basis of the National Elephant Conservation Policy of 2006 is fixed for argument on 07 December 2020.

Other cases include:

Galgamuwa Tusker's case (the famous elephant named "Dalaputtuwa") which is yet to receive Attorney General's advice.

WNPS is also co-petitioning a Fundamental Rights action against the removal of the environmental screening process involved in mining activities. This case is fixed for support on 27th November 2020.

## Have you read our latest Loris & Warana?

Click the covers to read our latest issues!  
[wnpssl.org/publications](http://wnpssl.org/publications)



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## We need your support.

All donations to the Society assist in our conservation efforts. *Click the link and donate today.*

# A helping hand for the Purple-Faced Langur

Bellanwila-Attidiya sanctuary extends 372ha and falls within the upper catchment of the Bolgoda river basin. Few conservation activities were carried out, prior to the launch of the Green-Isle project, despite conservation management plans being published. The sanctuary is home to over 150 species of bird and 20 species of mammal.

The Green Isle project for habitat enrichment was launched to provide a refuge for the endemic Purple Faced Leaf Monkey, which is critically endangered mainly due to loss of habitat.

Numerous events and activities carried out towards the end of 2019 and in the beginning of 2020 were of great success. School projects and public involvement in the Isle have been put on hold since March this year due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, despite the pandemic, the deteriorated barrel bridge has been reconstructed and the gate at the entrance was broadened in order to prevent intrusion.

Megathyrus Maximus, also known as Guinea Grass, which is a non-native Species, thrived during the 2-month lockdown period but has now been cleared and new saplings are being planted.

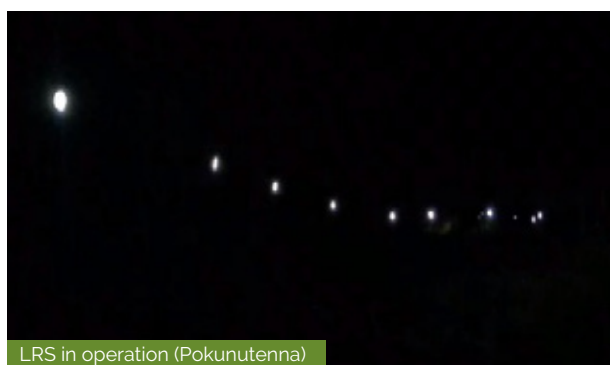


Barrel-bridge (before)

Gate and barrel-bridge (after)



Installed Light-Repel System



LRS in operation (Pokunutenna)

## Human Elephant Conflict: Is there light ahead?

There has been a noticeable rise in Human Elephant Conflict (HEC) over the past few years due to unplanned development, habitat fragmentation and habitat loss. This has resulted in the destruction of properties, as well as injuries and deaths on both sides of the equation. Unfortunately, no effective mitigation strategies have been formulated or implemented to date.

In an attempt to address this issue, the WNPS has teamed up with Brigadier Sudath Udayasena to roll out a pilot of the Light Repel System (LRS) to deter elephants from approaching farms and plantations. The LRS was developed by Brigadier Udayasena and consists of LED lights that will deter the elephant from entering the area protected by the LRS. As explained in previous Jungle Telegraphs and other forums, a biological defect in the elephant's eyesight is the premise on which the LRS is based. When a flickering LED light hits the elephant's retina, it is temporarily blinded and disoriented and thus would move away to avoid such a light.



The LRS has been installed in Degahewa (Wilachchiya), Ampara, Mahiyangana, Embalagama (Galgamuwa), Madawawegama (Thambuttegama), Ehetuwawegama (Nochchiyagama) and Paludeniya. The pilot project, which is currently underway, is focusing on the data that is being gathered from Embalagama and Mahiyangana. On regular field visits conducted by the team, it has been reported by the villagers, that the LRS has successfully deterred elephants from entering the village or plantations. No HEC related loss or damage to people, property or elephants have been reported during the period in which the pilot project has been operational.

The project is ongoing and the data gathered to date is promising. In fact, the only occasion where crops have been lost was on a night during which the LRS system was not turned on. The WNPS is in the process of expanding the pilot project to cover other areas so a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the LRS can be obtained.

The LRS is highly dependent on human cooperation, in ensuring that the LRS works every night. The farmers have to ensure that they maintain the lights, the electrical wires and charge the batteries as and when needed. Therefore, it is entirely dependent on if the LRS is maintained, to deter elephants coming into their plot of farmed land.

Studies of HEC mitigation strategies have shown that a single system of deterrence may not be effective in the long run, due the demonstrated ability of these highly intelligent animals to identify and apply solutions to problems. As a result, it is likely that the LRS will need to be implemented in conjunction with other systems.

The WNPS is currently looking into the use of infra-sound and also some plant-based solutions. The aim remains to deter elephants from encroaching on areas populated by humans without causing any harm to the animals.

## World Animal Day 2020

*Click the images to see more*

On the 4th of October each year, the world comes together to celebrate the animals that share our planet. This year, for World Animal Day, the WNPS decided to shine the spotlight on a lesser known, but critically important, reptile. Given that snakes are mysterious and widely feared, our goal was to educate and create awareness in the hope of helping to create a world in which humans can live in harmony with these wild and wonderful creatures.

### Russell's Viper (*Daboia russelii*)

Thith Polonga

Often confused for a python (non-venomous) which has larger blotches instead of oval markings and a blunter nose.

3 rows of circular dark markings on its back. Each spot has an inner black area and an outer white margin.

Arrow-shaped head with pink/brown V or X that forms an apex towards the snout

Stocky body with brown coloured dorsal surface

04 - 5.5 ft

Photograph courtesy of Sanoj Wimalakuma

Sri Lanka is home to over 100 species of snake but **less than 10** land snakes carry enough venom to cause a human death.

Most people think that all snakes are venomous and sadly, this myth causes panic and fear, frequently resulting in the death of **harmless** snakes.

More than half of Sri Lanka's inland snakes are **non-venomous**. Elapids (which include Cobras, Kraits and Coral snakes), Vipers and a few others (Colubrids) use venom to hunt prey.

Most snakes are **protected** under Section 31 of the Flora and Fauna Protection Ordinance (FFPO). Therefore, it is **illegal** to kill them, or have them in your possession, dead or alive.

**SAVE THE SNAKES**

### WHY SNAKES?

**Ecological importance**  
Snakes play multiple important roles in our ecosystem: they act as predators, prey, and even scavengers.

**Health benefits**  
Snakes naturally control the populations of disease carrying pests like rats and mice.

**SAVE THE SNAKES**

### Avoiding snake bites

Here's how to stay safe

When walking, playing or even gardening be conscious of where you put your hands and feet, especially in leafy environments. Snakes feel most comfortable in dark, quiet places when it's hot and sunny outside.

Snakes are more active during early morning and evening hours. Use a light at night to avoid stepping on a snake.

Teach children never to pick up snakes and to alert an adult if they see one. Most snakes are harmless; learn to identify which are not.

**SAVE THE SNAKES**



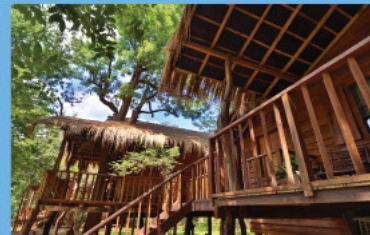


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## UPDATE: Youth Wing

In early September the Youth Wing conducted programmes at eight schools in Wasgamuwa, Udawalwe, Lunugamvehera and Weerawila - with over 600 students participating. The programmes, part of the second phase of engagement in the Youth Wing initiative educated students on their environmental rights and responsibilities. We also provided schools with toolkits that offer all the necessary guidance to launch environmental projects within school and community environments.

The flow of planned activities of the Youth Wing has been disrupted this year - due to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic; however, we have been incredibly resilient and adaptive to the 'new normal'.

Since the very onset of the quarantine curfew, we began with hosting virtual learning experiences, to keep up with engagement with youth and the general public. We have hosted skills sessions to promote citizen science, upcycling and theatre workshops - to raise awareness on the environment creatively, crossword challenges, a poetry competition and developed educational content on Instagram and Facebook about primates, wild cats, reptiles, amphibians, and mangroves.

For now, we anticipate having to put the core work of the Youth Wing, which includes schools visits and field trips to national parks, on hold till mid-2021. Hence, we will keep striving to be innovative and adaptive to current circumstances whilst ensuring we keep up with our essential mission of #EducationForConservation.

So, the pandemic will not be able to set us back! We will be bringing more online sessions, fun activities and challenges for you in the coming days. Stay tuned!





# WNPS PUBLIC LECTURE

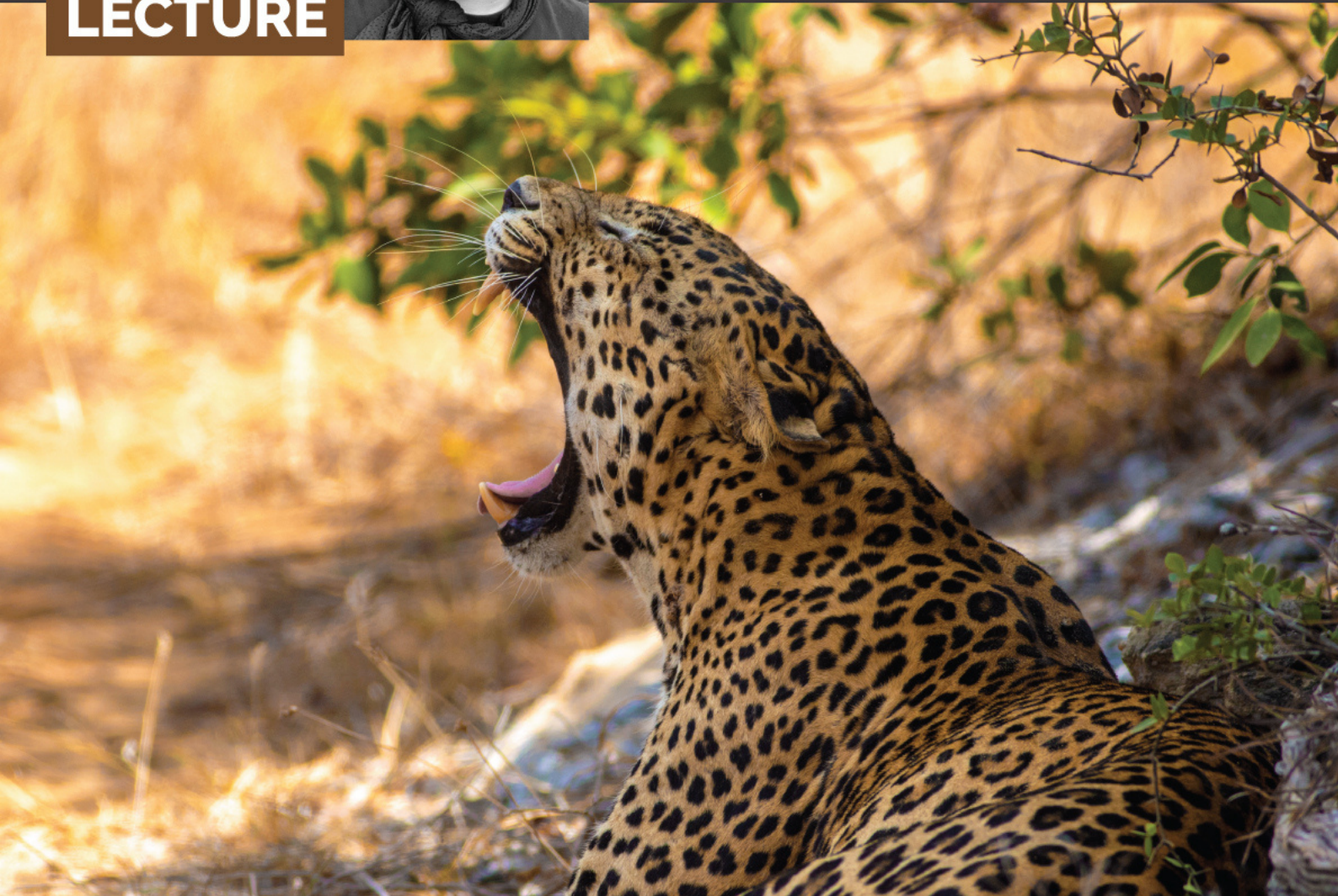


SPECIAL ONLINE LECTURE

19<sup>th</sup> Nov at 6.00pm

via Zoom and FB Live

*Dinal Samarasinghe*



## THE LEOPARDS OF WILPATTU NATIONAL PARK

Insights into a stronghold population of the Island's only big cat

### Missed a lecture?

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Our lectures are now available online.

[wnpssl.org/events/lectures/](http://wnpssl.org/events/lectures/)

# WNPS PUBLIC LECTURE



# A rainforest is born

The Reforestation of a Rainforest (ROAR) project site lies in the wet zone of Sri Lanka, in a village known as Dikkena, about 14km from Badureliya Town in the Kalutara District.

The ecological technique known as Relay Floristics has been adopted at the Diyakothakanda project site. The Relay Floristics technique involves a succession of incoming and outgoing plants leading to an equilibrium of the rainforest habitat. The ongoing work, which includes removal of invasive Kekilla (*Glychenea Linearis*) and planting Pioneer Species to provide shade and nourishment for the development of Primary Species, shows enormous success.

At present, the newly formed canopy cover of the Pioneer Species has effectively blocked the sunlight to reduce the aggressiveness of Kekilla thus providing the conditions required for the planting of Primary Forest Species, which now in progress.

Both Pioneer and Primary species are being kept in plant nurseries, ready to be planted in Zone C.

Diyakothakanda flourishes as rain continues to fall. Zone C remains untouched while Professor Gunathilake and Dr. Suranjan Fernando come up with a new strategy to approach it.





# Restoring our wetlands, one mangrove at a time.

Sri Lanka's vital mangrove forest cover comprises only 0.23% of the country's landmass. Mangrove habitat preservation and regeneration is therefore a top priority item on the agenda of activity.

It is in this backdrop, with the success and experience of the 'Reforestation of a Rainforest' project at Diyakothakanda and the Bellanwilla Attidiya project, that the WNPS has embarked on partnering the Department of Forests, Department of Wildlife Conservation and the Wayamba University in restoring an area in the Anawilundawa RAMSAR wetland.

Mangrove replanting cannot be successfully carried out unless the ecosystem supports the regeneration of a specific species of Mangrove. There are 22 species in Sri Lanka. This is carried out via a process called Assisted Natural Regeneration.

Assisted Natural Regeneration of Mangroves (ANRM) requires understanding the vegetation in the surrounding, current status of the area identified for regeneration and most importantly, physical environment. To assist natural regeneration and to mimic the surrounding healthy mangroves, the first step is site assessment; soil, water, flora and fauna all needs a careful examination.

The Anawilundawa Bird Sanctuary of the Department of Wildlife Conservation is situated in the Puttalam district in the North Western province of Sri Lanka, between Chilaw and Puttalam. It is a RAMSAR Site. A portion of the Sanctuary area adjacent to the Dutch Canal, north of the village of Muthupanthiya, consisted of mangrove forest that had been cleared many years previously, after the protected area had been established, for the establishment of prawn culture ponds. With the decline in prawn culture because of disease these ponds had been abandoned for a period of 15 to 20 years. The land was now degraded and covered in a growth of low grassy vegetation with scattered shrubs.



Soil sampling in progress



## Insurance for staff of the DWC

Department of Wildlife Conservation (DWC) staff who are left disabled following encounters with animals often face significant financial hardship; in the event of death, their families are left destitute. While many rely on donations and contributions from the wildlife fraternity to survive, it is not a structured or a sustainable solution. In October 2020, The WNPS obtained an insurance policy through HNB Assurance on behalf of the DWC employees. It will provide a Death and Permanent Disability Cover of Rs. 500,000 per incident for up to 2700 persons. The insurance premium was covered by generous donors of the Society.



*Three months into our project, our young  
Nature Nurturers are hard at work!*



# nature nurturers





# IN THE NEWS

*Click the links to read more*



## **NEW SPECIES OF SNAKES DISCOVERED IN KNUCKLES, SRI LANKA**

*Aspidurai desilvai* and *Rhinophis gunasekari*, which are critically endangered, were discovered recently in the Central Highlands by Sri Lankan herpetologist Mendis Wickramasinghe.

## **SRI LANKA RESCUES 120 WHALES AFTER MASS STRANDING**

The Sri Lanka Navy, Police, DWC, Coast Guard, multiple volunteer organisations, and hundreds of individuals came together to rescue over a hundred pilot whales who were stranded on the beaches of Panadura.



## **7 THINGS TO LEARN FROM DAVID ATTENBOROUGH'S HEARTBREAKING DOCUMENTARY ABOUT EXTINCTION**

The legendary naturalist explained the link between wildlife loss and pandemics like COVID-19 in his latest documentary, BBC One's *Extinction: The Facts*.