A Ramble in Maduru Oya National Park

Posted on



A majestic peacock marches along the open grassland.

The afternoon sun blazed down as we set on the last leg of our journey. Our destination, Maduru Oya National Park was fast approaching, and we were excited to witness the wildlife that was roaming in the Park.

Words Roomini Wijayarathne.

Photographs Menaka Aravinda, Anuradha Perera and Tatiyana Welikala.

Close to 270 kilometers away from the hustle and bustle of Colombo, the rhythm of life slows down. Signs of civilization – vehicles, shops, and even people – are few and far between, and it is merely yourself and the trees that tower over the carpeted yet unfrequented road, the endless woodlands, and the soft breeze that ruffles the greenery.

Such a road led us to the Maduru Oya National Park, hidden in the wilds off Manampitiya in the Polonnaruwa District. At the entrance to the Park was a Wildlife Museum: small, yet packed with interesting specimen. This gave us a glimpse of what to expect on our safari, as we set off into the heart of the wild. The jeep turned into a path that led to the Maduru Oya reservoir, and to our delight, a large herd of deer appeared. Fawns tumbled about as adult deer grazed on the open meadow. A family of common langurs scrambled about among the deer, in perfect harmony.

We set off on our way, our eyes vigilant for the giant of the wild. Just as we anticipated, a couple of
elephants emerged from the undergrowth, their trunks tugging at small branches of nearby trees. They must have heard the loud hum of the engine; they did not come close.

We were soon greeted by another safari jeep who gave us the best news: there was an elephant close to the road a little way ahead of us.



The vast Maduru Oya Dam is situated 40km South of Manampitiya.

Craning our necks, we looked on as we approached the elephant. Easily above seven feet tall, the giant was grazing a mere five meters away from us. We had

been advised not to approach lone male elephants, as such we did not venture near him. He eyed us a couple of times, probably curious as to who these strangers were, but indicated no harmful intention. He grazed on peacefully, and we clicked away with our cameras.

An unusual tree appeared as we set off again: a towering banyan, with a perfectly defined arch in the middle of its trunk. It was called ‘Ali Panawa’ – elephant comb, and it was, according to our guide, where elephants came to scratch their backs.

We veered into an undefined path in the wild and immediately spotted a crested hawk eagle high atop a branch. Sitting majestically in the backdrop of a vividly blue sky, he created a magnificent sight. Our time in the Park was running out, and we turned back. Accompanying us as we drove along was a jackal. He seemed to think we were following him, and he ran faster ahead of us. Bidding adieu to the energetic little fellow, we pulled out of the Maduru Oya National Park, but our surprises were not over. Strutting across the open grassland was a peacock, his feathers vivid in the sun.

Satisfied with our delightful sights, we drove towards the Maduru Oya Dam, with the sun setting in the horizon. The dam spanned across more than a kilometer, the vista it offered, of the Maduru Oya reservoir, of dark mountains in the distance and of the sky with beautiful colors, was spell-binding.

Night had fallen when we drove back, and suddenly, the jeep slammed to a halt. A lone elephant had wandered into the driveway and the driver had seen him just on time. We reversed the vehicle and took another road, leaving the giant of the wild in his element.

Thrilled at the exciting end to our day we drove away, relishing in our remarkable experiences.










