

Twelve Years in Waiting

Posted on

The Delicate Dance of the Nelu Flower



If the Horton Plains Nature Reserve is hailed as God's own flower garden, then the Nelu flower is its most distinguished visitor, arriving each season to grace the landscape with its fleeting presence.

Since August, Horton Plains in Nuwara Eliya has been alive with visitors from all over Sri Lanka, drawn to witness a rare natural spectacle – the Nelu (*Strobilanthes*) bloom, occurring once every twelve years.

A vibrant sea of pink and purple carpets, from a gentle blush to deep magenta, the trail to Thotupola Kanda, the island's third-highest peak, as the flowers emerge from their long dormancy to dazzle the landscape with their fleeting grandeur.

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Last seen in 2013, the species was documented in 1881 by Englishman Thomas Farr, who noted that certain varieties bloom simultaneously. Sri Lanka is home to 31 varieties, 12 of which are endemic to the island. Six of these thrive in the Horton Plains – two bloom every 12 years, while others follow cycles of six, four, or three years. This year's bloom is expected to last until December.

The trail to Thotupola Kanda winds through a dreamlike landscape, bordered by countless Nelu blooms, along narrow paths hedged by them, and open expanses awash in their delicate and vibrant colors, reigning majestically over the plains. Some distinct sounds ring through this festoon of flowers – the gentle hum of bees and the call of birds accompany every step. Experiencing this rare spectacle is a joyous privilege – one that calls for care and respect. So, take in the wonder, and leave nothing behind but footprints.

