Walking through Shades of Green

Posted on



Inside the Horagolla National Park

The gentle pitter patter of the rain pierced the otherwise silent surroundings as we stepped along the leave strewn walkway. As we moved onwards, every now and then the call of the birds resonated from above, though non were in sight. Thus we rambled on leisurely, enjoying the calm environs of the Horagolla National Park in Gampaha.

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Situated in the Nambaduluwa village in Udagampatthuwa of the Siyane Korale in the Gampaha District, the Horagolla National Park is 33 acres large. The name Horagolla is derived from the lavish amount of hora trees decorating the Park and the forest reserve is commonly known as the Hora Kelaya (Hora Jungle). Encircled by villages on three sides and by the Horagolla Walauwa – the house of the

Bandaranaike family – on one side, the National Park was under the control of the State in the 1970s. However, in October 5, 1973 the Park was named as a wildlife sanctuary under the Flora and Fauna Ordinance and went onto attain the status of a national park in July 28, 2004 under the same ordinance. Known as the only urban park in the Western Province, The Horagolla National Park is the smallest national park under the Department of Wildlife Conservation.

The start of our journey towards the entrance of the Horagolla National Park lay along a narrow gravel path lined with a man-made wall and coconut trees on either sides. Treading this path we emerged at the entrance and was able to view the Horagolla Wewa that stood silent while small raindrops disturbed its murky surface. As we were about to begin our journey on foot through the Park, we were advised to keep to the stone pathway and to follow the arrows. Heeding these words with much care we entered the National Park keeping our senses alert in the hopes of catching a glimpse of the animals inhabiting this unique space.

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The stone pathway was lined with tall trees and the forest ground was covered with a thick layer of leaves and overhead, the thick canopy gave us protection from the drizzling rain as we trudged on. Coming onto a cross section, we stopped for sometime to get a better look at our surroundings. Looking back and forth, we realised that all paths looked alike as varied hues of greens and browns encircled us. However, tree trunks with yellow numbers and arrows, directed and kept us on the right track aiding us on our way through unfamiliar territory.

Many times we heard the call of birds and other animals, though all remained elusive to our watchful eyes. Nevertheless, we were not disappointed as the calm and serene atmosphere of the Park made way for a delightful stroll. Benches and chairs situated at random points through the pathway also attested to the fact that the Park is popular as a leisure spot among people. At one point we sat down on one of these benches to enjoy the tranquil atmosphere that was far removed from the constant heat and the flurry of activity in the city. As we moved along, at times the sun peeped through and we were able to glimpse feeble rays of light that dappled the ground creating an enchanting impression.

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Belonging to the low country wet zone, the Horagolla National Park receives rain mainly from the south west monsoon. Besides Hora, trees such as Kekuna (*Canarium zeylanicum*), Godapara (*Dillenia retusa*), Diyapara (*Wormia triqueta*), Nedun (*Pericopsis mooniana*) and more cover the Park grounds while vines such as Himubutu (*Salacia reiculata*), Korasa (*Tetracera sarmentosa*), Ma Veval (*Calamus zeylanicus*) and more drape and dangle from trees, weaving intricate patterns. The National Park is also home to many species of animals including mammals such as the Fishing Cat, Rusty-spotted Cat, Spotted chevrotains (Moschiola or *Meeminna*) and the Grizzled Giant Squirrel (*Dandu Lena*); birds such as the Sri Lanka Hanging Parrot, Black-crested Bulbul, Layard's Parakeet and the Brown-capped Babbler; and snakes such as the Russell's viper and the hump-nosed viper to name a few.

The National Park not only provides a space for people to enjoy the beauty of nature without travelling far, it also provides a place for injured animals to recover amidst much care

Passing a small summer house built to provide some respite after a long walk, we reached the end of our trek through the National Park. Heading towards the office located at the entrance, we took note of a small area equipped with caged animals. Curious, we approached the space and soon realised that all animals within the cages were either permanently or temporarily injured and were recovering. Signs hung on each cage indicated the place that these animals were found and the cause of their injuries. A Rusty-spotted Cat wounded by an Asian Water Monitor, a Crested Serpent Eagle and a Crested Hawk Eagle injured by electric shocks, and two Fishing Cat cubs made up the litter of animals. While the Eagles stared back at us intently as we peered in, the small Rusty-spotted Cat restlessly darted around hissing at the imposing strangers around his cage. However, the two Fishing Cat cubs surveyed us with much interest at first though soon abandoning their scrutiny to follow a more exciting game of tag.

The Horagolla National Park is invaluable – it not only provides a space for people to enjoy the beauty of nature without travelling far, it also provides a place for injured animals to recover amidst much care. Be it for educational or recreational purposes, the Park is a treasure trove for all who visit.

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