



A glimmer of gold amidst the darkness, the royal leopard of Wilpattu

Declared as a National Park in the year 1938, Wilpattu is considered one of the oldest national parks in Sri Lanka. With little human visitors and a vast wilderness of many terrains, it is an exciting place for all nature lovers.

Words and Photographs Raveendra Siriwardene



A grey heron glistening in the dark

The park has two entry points, the Hunuwilagama entrance is the main entrance, and the Eluwankulama entrance can be used for day visits. This park covers 131,693 ha of the Northwest coast low land dry zone of the Island. To its north is the Kala Oya and on the south it is bordered by Modaragam Aru.

Wilpattu National Park was named Sri Lanka's sixth Ramsar wetland. An exclusive feature of this park is that it has a large number of Villus or natural lakes in various locations

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thereby making Wilpattu “the Lands of Lakes”. These Villus are filled with rainwater. The park mainly gets showers from the Northeastern monsoon during the period of September to December, while non-seasonal rains reach the area in April and May. The park has a comparatively good gravel and sandy road system unlike other parks.

Wilpattu national park consists of different natural habitats; from lakes with beautiful open grasslands to thick forests, savannahs and scrublands, open grasslands, coastal belt with sandy surfaces and many more terrains, which provide life for a great number of animals that inhabit this reserve.

Located in the dry and semiarid zones in the country, the park consists of three types of vegetation, namely “littoral vegetation”, which includes salt grass and low scrub; the coastal belt of “monsoon scrub” and the “wooded forests”. Further, the majority of the park is covered with thick forests and has well grown, tall and healthy trees such as *Palu* (Ceylon iron wood), *Burutha* (Satinwood), *Weera* (*Drypetes sepiaria*), *Milla* (*Vitex altissima*), *Mara* (Gulmohar), *Lunumidella* (Persian lilac) and Ebony.

The beautiful coastal belt covers the western border of the park, which consists of a different landscape. Certain parts of the reserve is covered in thick jungle where even the sky cannot be seen and sunlight does not penetrate through the forest cover, even on a very hot day.

Over thirty species of mammals can be seen in Wilpattu and includes leopards, sloth bears, elephants, buffaloes, spotted deer, barking deer, sambar deer, grey langurs, wild boars and golden jackals. A big cat walking towards your jeep on a sandy road on a beautiful evening with the sunset as the background will be an enriching experience. Wilpattu national park is among the top world-renowned parks for its large leopard population.

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Two giants test their strength at Pomparippu, the prehistoric burial ground

Pomparippu and Mahawewa areas are known as places to see the Asian Elephant; if you are lucky you will see some gigantic tuskers as well. The Puttalam-Silawathura main road that crosses over the Pomparippu area, is generally closed to the public during the night as wildlife are known to move freely in that area.

It is our responsibility to conserve and protect these habitats as well as the precious wildlife that call this park their home so that the majesty of Wilpattu prevails...

All deer species, wild boars and grey langurs are natural prey for leopards. On occasion leopards have been seen eating monitor lizards and mugger crocodiles.

A huge number of bird species, including endemic birds such as Sri Lankan jungle fowl, black capped bulbul, Sri Lankan wood shrike, brown capped babbler, grey hornbill and crimson-fronted barbet can be seen in Wilpattu throughout the year. From the end of October to March, you can observe plenty of winter migrant birds, especially in and around all lakes.

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In addition to the above, reptile species commonly visible in the Wilpattu National Park are mugger crocodiles, monitor lizards, painted-lipped lizards, the common cobra, rat snake and Indian python. Different varieties of butterflies have also been recorded in the Wilpattu National Park, among them great orange tip, blue mormon, common mormon, common rose, Chinese rose, and Gladeye bushbrown.

While wildlife predominates, Wilpattu is also linked to the history of the country. It is said that Prince Vijaya landed on the shores of Thambapanni, which is located within the park. Furthermore, the burial site of prehistoric man is located in Pomparippu. There are numerous other legends as well.

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