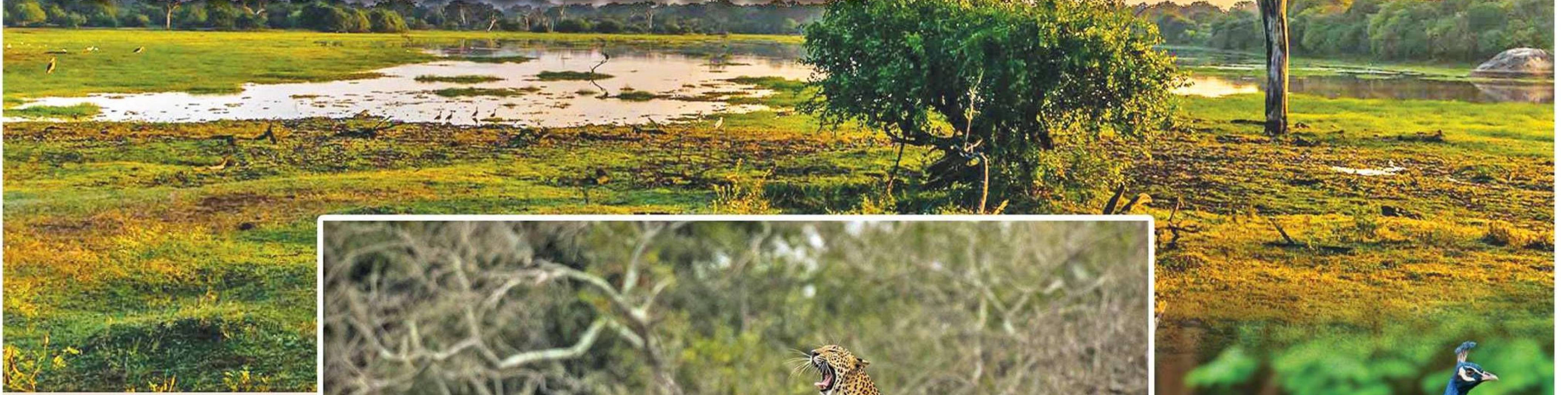


# ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF YALA NATIONAL PARK



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*The Yala (Ruhuna) National Park which covers an area of 97,880.7 hectares spreading over the administrative districts of Moneragala and Hambantota in the Uva and Southern Provinces is a very popular wildlife reserve among wildlife lovers both here and overseas. Having been declared a National Reserve on the 25th of February 1938, the Yala National Park is one of the most important national parks in Sri Lanka while being second - largest after Wilpattu National Park.*

A variety of major ecosystems inhabited by diverse fauna have been identified here, such as secondary arid tropical thorny forests, wet and dry monsoon forests, semi-deciduous forests, grasslands, freshwater and seawater wetlands, as well as beach areas with sand dunes. It is home to hundreds of endangered species of mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, amphibians, and plants, as well as several endangered species such as the globally endangered wild elephant (*Elephas maximus maximus*) and the endangered



leopard (*Panthera pardus kotiya*). Due to these reasons, the Yala National Park attracts many local and foreign tourists.

### OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Some of the main problems identified when managing Yala include the stress on the normal behaviour of wild animals due to tourism activities; the movements of animal species to surrounding villages, and farmlands, in search of food and water, especially during the dry season; and the resulting human-wildlife conflicts. In addition, the lack of drinking water facilities for the park staff is also an identified problem. The Ecosystem Conservation and Management Project (ESCAMP) is currently providing financial support to the Department of Wildlife Conservation to overcome these problems under its programme for protected area management and development of tourism facilities within the reserve.

### ENHANCING FACILITIES

As a strategic approach to reduce the pressure on animals from visitors, travel within the park has been prohibited from 12.00 noon to 2 pm daily, and a visitor centre with all facilities is being set up in the park's Patanangala area to accommodate visitors during that time. The other visitor center that is being built near a beautiful beach front area aims to provide tourists with knowledge of the surrounding environment, facilities to buy snacks and drinks, while providing an opportunity to

purchase souvenirs to remember their trip to Yala. Funding from ESCAMP has been utilised for these activities too.

### QUENCHING THE THIRST

In order to enhance water capacity in the reserve, tanks and water holes were renovated and developed with ESCAMP funding. Accordingly, 7 water holes of natural rock which hold water throughout the year were cleaned out and capacity developed. 12 other small water holes were also repaired and restored. In addition, an underground water pipeline system is being constructed covering 20 km from the Manik River crossing area to Palatupana, to supply water to eleven small water holes located in Block 1 of the Yala Reserve.

The supply of water to water holes within the reserve during the dry season improves the access to water for wildlife, and also contributes to the fertile growth of flora around the water holes. This in turn helps replenish the food requirements of the wildlife within the park; thus discouraging movements to human habitats.

Maintenance of the reserve by the removal of alien and invasive plant species makes it easier for animals to obtain their food by enhancing the growth of grass in their surrounding ecosystems.

A water supply control plan is being developed so that water can be made available when required, without affecting the existing ecological balance. This can also ensure uninterrupted water supply during the rainy season. However, regular follow-up on the potential impact of this is important. Thus, this plan is being implemented by the

Department of Wildlife Conservation with the support of surrounding communities and interested parties.

The waterpipe-laying project will also enable the Yala National Park to provide clean drinking water to the park staff, which has been a challenge since the park's inception. This can also be considered a very positive achievement of this dynamic project.

### ENRICHING ANIMAL HABITATS

Improving food, water, cover, and space to suit each species is one of the key factors to be considered when improving animal habitats. Water retention capacity has been increased to cover identified areas in the Yala National Park. In addition to constructing reservoirs to increase the water capacity of Yala Zone 05, Lunugamvehera National Park, measures have been taken to boost the capacity of fodder plants by removing non-edible plants and thereby increase the capacity of grasslands.

Through such activities, the ESCAMP project has greatly assisted the Department of Wildlife Conservation to enhance the park's biodiversity while upgrading tourism facilities.



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