

CONSERVATION OF THE SRI LANKAN LEOPARD

WNPS monthly discussion on August 18

WNPS monthly lecture/discussion, Conservation of the Sri Lankan Leopard will held at the BMICH with the participation of Prof. Enoka Kudavidanage, Rukshan Jayewardene, and Kithsiri Gunawardena (moderated by Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne) on August 18 at 6 pm.

At the beginning of the 1900s, it was estimated that there were 1,600 wild leopards in Sri Lanka. It is uncertain as to the accuracy of this claim, or the scientific basis for the research that led to this figure being determined. It was probably more of a 'guesstimate', based on the accumulated knowledge at that time. Even today, we have to rely on such guesstimates as, to date, no comprehensive scientific survey has been conducted, island-wide, to establish a definitive number. These estimates vary between 800 and 1,000, for the entire country. As such, it is difficult to make accurate assessment of whether their number has increased or decreased with time.

What is certain, however, based on the intensive research that has been conducted in recent times, in protected areas and their surrounds, is that the number of confirmed leopard deaths has been on the increase. 41 were killed in last 5 years, mostly upcountry, and a number have already died this year. Where once leopards were killed for their beautiful pelts, there is evidence to suggest that they are being increasingly targeted for their teeth and claws; as substitutes for tiger claws in the aphrodisiac and sorcery trades. In addition, and most perilous to this already endangered species, is the loss of their natural habitat due to illegal human encroachment. Inevitably, this results in the reduction of the prey species that also inhabit these areas.

The leopards, then, enter human habitation in search of food and are killed in the most horrendous ways – snares, trap guns, poisons, et al. – often in agony for many hours and days before death releases them. There is a mistaken belief, amongst some, that the population of leopards is increasing. In fact, it is just that they have become more visible, drawn to-



Kithsiri Gunawardena



Prof. Enoka Kudavidanage



Rukshan Jayewardene



Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne

wards human settlements in search of food.

It is essential that Sri Lanka's apex predator, the leopard, is conserved with strategies based on good science. The continued survival of the interconnected community, of which it is a vital component, depends on it too.

Prof. Enoka Kudavidanage, Rukshan Jayewardene, and Kithsiri Gunawardena are acknowledged, as some of the three best 'brains' on leopard behaviour, and on the pressures for their conservation.

The WNPS is privileged to have their services on a panel discussion to discuss the present status of the wild leopard, and of the measures necessary for their future conservation. The discussion will be moderated by Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne the former President of the Society. This is surely a discussion to be followed by those who love the leopard.

servation Committee of the WNPS, Advisor to the Multiregional Leopard Research and Monitoring Network of Sri Lanka, and a Trustee of the FEO

Rukshan Jayewardene, a founding trustee at the Leopard Trust; Chairman of the Wilderness and Protected Areas Foundation, former Director at the Environmental Foundation Limited (EFL) and past President of the WNPS. A lifelong passion for Wildlife; Interested in evolution, adaptive radiation of species, the long-term conservation of leopards and all biodiversity related issues. A wildlife photographer who believes the role of photography in conservation is best served by adhering to standards and ethics.

Kithsiri Gunawardena: There is perhaps none, since the end of the battle against terrorism, that has learned more about Wilpattu than Kithsiri Gunawardena. Despite his busy schedule as the Chief Operating Officer of LOLC Group he finds the time to visit the Park as often as possible and has set up an invaluable database to record the leopards of the Park. A renowned ornithologist in his own right, his love of Wilpattu extends beyond the more popular species to its lepidoptera, and to all other creatures great and small. With his extensive knowledge of the Park and its history, there is none better to give description of the wonders of this National, natural treasure, of its secrets, and of the dangers that beset it today.

Moderator Sriyan de Silva Wijeyeratne is a former President of the WNPS and currently Chairman of PLANT. A previous chair of the Wild Cat subcommittee, he conceptualised the notion of a Leopard Day which later became a reality. A passionate Conservationist who loves the great outdoors, he enjoys photography and music. A Corporate Leader and former Chairman of the ETF Board, he has several academic and business awards to his credit and is a frequent speaker at forums. He is involved in Chambers and in local and global charities, and recently published his second photographic journal titled "Wild World-All Eyes on Nature"

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