



THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA

Sri Lanka's Lost Animals: The Pleistocene Period

By Mr. Kelum Nalinada Manamendra-Arachchi

**The Monthly Lecture Series No: 142 of the National Trust
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The fossils of the Pleistocene period (ranging from 2-1.67 million years before present to about 12,000-10,000 years before present) in Sri Lanka are primarily found embedded in the gem gravels or alluvial deposits of the Ratnapura area, and in the strata immediately above Ratnapura. The gem pits of Ratnapura, which are the gold mines to the zoo-archaeologists, have yielded several fossils of an extinct fauna. Popularly known as 'Ratnapura fauna' in zoo-archaeology, it comprises fossils of middle Pleistocene, upper Pleistocene and sub recent animals mixed up by re- deposition. An extinct fauna of Sri Lanka includes two species of terrapins (*Geomyda trijuga sinhaleya*, *Trionyx punctata sinhaleya*), a crocodile (*Crocodylus sinhaleyus*), two species of rhinoceros (*Rhinoceros sinhaleyus* and *R. kagavena*), a hippopotamus (*Hexaprotodon sinhaleyus*), a gaur (*Bos gaurus sinhaleyus*), three elephants (*Elephas hysudricus*, *E. namadicus* and *E. m. sinhaleyus*), a lion (*Panthera leo sinhaleyus*), a tiger (*Panthera tigris*), a wild boar (*Sus sinhaleyus*), a bull (*Gona sinhaleya*), a wild buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis migona*) and a deer (*Muva sinhaleya*). The last is a smaller deer, known from antler bases and molars. Backed by sound theoretical knowledge in zoo-archaeology and scientific analysis using radiocarbon as well as thermoluminescence dating and illustrated by excellent drawings and paintings conjecturing Sri Lanka's lost animals with evidence-based research, the lecture will take us back in time to our unknown past to emphasise the richness of Sri Lanka's Ratnapura fauna, which is now extinct.



One of Sri Lanka's foremost zoo-archaeologist, Mr. Kelum Manamendra-Arachchi has a research experience of over 30 years focussing primarily on Sri Lanka's zoology, taxonomy, and palaeontology. In 1980, he began his study of wildlife and zoology and entered the field of zoo-archaeology in 1985, joining the Department of Archaeology where he had the opportunity of working closely with Mr. P.B. Karunaratne who was the country's foremost Zoo-Archaeologist at the time. Later, he served as a full-time Research Associate at the Wildlife Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka from 1993-2009. He has led several teams of researchers on multiple projects including taxonomic and ecological research focused on the amphibians, freshwater fishes and reptiles. In addition, Mr. Manamendra-Arachchi was also involved in, and collaborated on a range of other studies on the evolution and biogeography and ecology of Sri Lanka's amphibian fauna. His two books, *The Amphibian Fauna of Sri Lanka* (1995) and *Sri Lankawè Ubhayajeevin* (2007) are testimony to his encyclopaedic grasp of Sri Lankan herpetology. Since 2009 he is serving the Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology at the University of Kelaniya, as a research fellow, focussing primarily on zooarchaeology and pleistocene palaeontology.

The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures generally on the last working Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the general public. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.

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