

1. Abstract

With regard to the National Reserves, Sri Lanka occupies a unique position in the world as a country that has by Royal decree declared a 'Wildlife Refuge', 2,500 years ago as per its continuously documented history. This tradition has been honoured by the successive kings and queens of this island nation, in spite of invasions and occupations by foreign nations. The Sri Lankan Royal Dynasty ceased to exist after the British occupation of the whole country in the year 1805.

However, the British enacted many laws to demarcate clearly zones and territories for the welfare and propagation of wildlife, although at times it was to fulfill the needs of certain groups. These matters are discussed in detail in the body of this research document. Owing to the breakdown of the centuries old social structure and lifestyle of the local population under the British rule, large tracts of land that were well-preserved by the ancient kings in a natural condition were deprived for wildlife; while large areas of land cultivated for centuries became animal habitats due to disuse and neglect.

This scenario started to rapidly change after Sri Lanka gained independence from the British, due to massive development schemes that gave complete priority to the welfare and needs of a burgeoning populace. Although a plethora of legislation was enacted seemingly to safeguard wildlife and their habitats, it is quite evident that the successive governments had to give preference to the needs of the inhabitants and the financial gains from the tourism industry; over the wellbeing and livelihood of wild animals. In spite of the fact that there are separate Ministries for Wildlife, Environmental Protection, and Forest Conservation, with a gamut of departments and individuals whose sole function is supposed to what the names imply; on most instances the trend indicates otherwise.

In this research study, the author has done his best to unravel and expose the underlying Sociological, Political, Financial and Religious trends of the country and those of 'Interest Groups' that already have and could further erode the health of the National Parks and their innocent denizens, who have no access to the judicial system laid down for their sake by humans. However, it is heartening to note that quite a number of new environmental groups have now been formed, consisting of many committed individuals from the younger generations, to counter this negative trend. Also, a new regime change resulted in some degree of benevolent attitudes for the National Reserves of the country.

Investigative Case Study' analysisbasis, which is elaborated under the 'Research Methodology', has been adopted for this Research Project. A total of eight separate visits have been made to the three NPs under study, with each visit having a duration of not less than three days, and extensive travel within each NP on each occasion; while making observations and interviewing the WLC Field Staff at all levels.

Visits have also been made to Maduru Oya NP, Lunugamwehera NP, Lahugala NP and also Kamana NP; in order to extrapolate in some measure the findings in the focus areas.