

Ecosystem Integration and Ecotourism Potentials in Kala Oya Estuary, Sri Lanka

Gunathilaka, M. D. K. L.¹

Ecotourism is a sustainable alternative to the more conventional tourism and has grown in popularity worldwide. Although the concept of ecotourism is new to Sri Lanka, it has the potential to develop as a major ecotourism destination in Asia. As the Government of Sri Lanka intends to increase tourist arrivals and revenue, development of ecotourism in Sri Lanka has to be an important feature of national tourism strategy. Accordingly, this study aimed to identify the integration of ecosystems and opportunities for ecotourism in Kala Oya Estuary in the Puttalam District. Vegetation sampling was carried out using the belt transect method. 15 sample plots of 5m x 5m quadrants were selected to examine the degree of integration of ecosystem. 25 randomly selected individuals comprising owners of tourist accommodation and villagers were interviewed to identify ecotourism opportunity in the Estuary.

Shannon-Wiener diversity index (H_1) was calculated to find the diversity of mangroves. Spatial maps were prepared using ArcGIS and Google Earth software and statistical analysis was performed using MS Excel. Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic content analysis. It was found that the Kala Oya Estuary consists of significantly rich species and is associated with fewer constraints for ecotourism. Therefore, it is recommended to manage the area by encouraging the use of voluntary environmental tools and promotional programs to increase the ecotourism potential in the Kala Oya.

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¹ Department of Zoology and Environmental Sciences, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka
(kalpani.lakmali92@gmail.com)