

Weliange, W.S., Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology  
A. S. Dandeniya, BGJF Consultancy Services  
P. Algiriya, Postgraduate Institute of Archaeology  
A.M.D. Alahakoon, Dinesh Dewage

*Paper: Sustainability*

## **Ethno-eththo of Sri Lanka, the Vanneale: Ornithology of the Veddah**

Interviews were conducted with Veddah; the aboriginal people in Sri Lanka, during fieldwork in 2010 and 2011. Joint observations of birds in the wild, examination of illustrations and bird calls helped generate 25 Veddah names of bird species in two Veddah homelands; Dambana and Nilgala in the Ampaara district, in Sri Lanka.

Vernacular names, practical uses, food and other behavioural patterns, and folk beliefs concerning the birds were recorded. Local names were given based on the behaviour; particularly their feeding pattern, place of living and colour patterns in the body. While the birds occupy almost a negligible position in the diet and subsistence activities of the Veddah, birds have important meanings in folk beliefs, spiritual and cultural life. Bird names are also found in several poems and songs. The birds are believed to convey information on unpredictable distribution of animals and their behaviour in the forest.

Veddah knowledge of birds is not limited to economically important species, as is often assumed. Veddah are familiar with most discernible species. Ethno-ornithology serves as a platform for studying specific relationships between indigenous culture and endemic birds to help increase local awareness of traditional knowledge. Increasing concerns on sustainable-use and community-based strategies also emphasize the importance of ethno-ornithology, and its implications for biodiversity conservation.

**Keywords: Biodiversity conservation, Traditional knowledge, Folk belief, Birds**