

## BIO DIVERSITY IN THE CLOUD FORESTS OF THE KNUCKLES RANGE

D.R.N.S. Rajapaksha<sup>1</sup> & V.A.M.P.K. Samarawickrama<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Peradeniya

<sup>2</sup> IUCN -The World Conservation Union

The Knuckles Mountain Range is situated in the Intermediate Zone between the latitudes 7°18'-7°34' and longitudes 80°41'-80°55' within a 915-1906m elevation range in the Matale District. The slopes directly exposed to monsoon winds receive a high amount of rainfall (2725-4470 mm) per annum. Temperature in the area ranges between 25°C and 27°C at lower altitudes and 18°C-20°C at higher altitudes.

Data were collected in the two localities Nawaganala and Deenston Nature trail in the sub-montane and montane forests on the west facing slopes from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. on 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> August 2002.

The trees are low in stature (< 10m), gnarled and covered with lichens, mosses and epiphytic ferns. These plants represent the life forms; trees, shrubs, herbs, creepers/ lianas. Their dominant families are Myrtaceae (*Syzygium* sp.), Rutaceae (*Toddalia* sp.), Clusiaceae (*Calophyllum* sp.), Orchidaceae (*Eria bicolor*) and Liliaceae (*Asparagus* sp.). The total number of species observed exceed 35.

The animal life is highly diverse too. The total number of species identified in study area was 124 with 67 bird species (9 endemic), 2 fish (1 endemic), 20 butterflies (2 endemic), 16 mammals (4 endemic), amphibians (6 endemic) and 19 reptiles.

The Nawaganala and Deenston nature trail are unique areas of island's bio diversity heritage. There are more plant and animal species, especially amphibians yet to be identified. The area faces the threat of periodic fires triggered by people. Moreover, the Deenston nature trail experiences the problem of garbage. Therefore, the bio diversity of this unique area has to be conserved for future generations.