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Assessing the Ecotourism Potential in Sarasalai-Kuruviikkadu and Adjacent Areas in the Jaffna Peninsula, Sri Lanka**Packiyathan, R.^{1*}, Wijesundara, C.S.²**¹*Wetland Conservation Society, Sri Lanka*²*Department of Zoology, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka**vpraj711@gmail.com**Abstract**

Ecotourism is environmentally responsible, enlightening travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations. Sarasalai Kuruviikkadu and adjacent areas such as Anthanathidal and Kapputhu in the Jaffna District are rich with significant extents of mangroves that are notable for their waterbirds' diversity. The diversity and abundance of birds and the ecotourism potential of those areas have not been evaluated probably due to the three decades long civil unrest. The objective of the present study was to evaluate the nature-based ecotourism potential of Sarasalai Kuruviikkadu and adjacent areas. Geographic Information System was used as tool for identify the potential status of entire Jaffna District. Suitability analysis was applied and Multi Criteria Decision Method (MCDM) and criteria ranking method were used. Three aspects such as Flamingo sites (13), other birds' sites (40) and mangroves areas (66) in the district including study areas were considered for suitability analysis. The evaluating process for ecotourism sites were conducted based on criteria *viz.* species richness (of birds), tourist preferences, proximity to residential areas, proximity to accommodation, distance from roads, scenic beauty and density and distribution. Based on each three analysis, Potentials sites were derived based on priority ranking such high, moderate, and low potential. Through the overall analysis, the study areas, Sarasalai and Anthanathidal come under the high potential areas (> 75%) and Kapputhu represents lower potential (<45%) based on flamingo and other birds aspects but based on mangrove sites' analysis, both areas represent high potential status and Kapputhu represents lower status. Our recent studies have shown that Sarasalai is home to at least 82 species of waterbirds (Margalef's Index 6.74) and Anthanathidal represents 47 species (Margalef's Index 9.23) and Kapputhu 22 species (Margalef's Index 3.04). In addition to some of mammals, crocodiles and fishes were recorded in the study areas that have a high potential for promoting ecotourism. The areas had a high abundance of flamingos, which are a major Avi-tourist attraction. The study areas have large extents mangroves (896.6 ha) with four true mangrove species, *Excoecaria agallocha*, *Lumnitzera racemosa*, *Rhizophora mucronate* and *Aegiceras corniculatum* which is a unique ecotone and attraction and sources for ecotourism. Hence these areas have a great nature-based tourism potential. There is also a great potential for the participation of local people for promotion of ecotourism in the Jaffna peninsula, elevating their poverty.

Key words: Sarasalai, Kuruviikkadu, Ecotourism potential, Mangroves, Flamingo