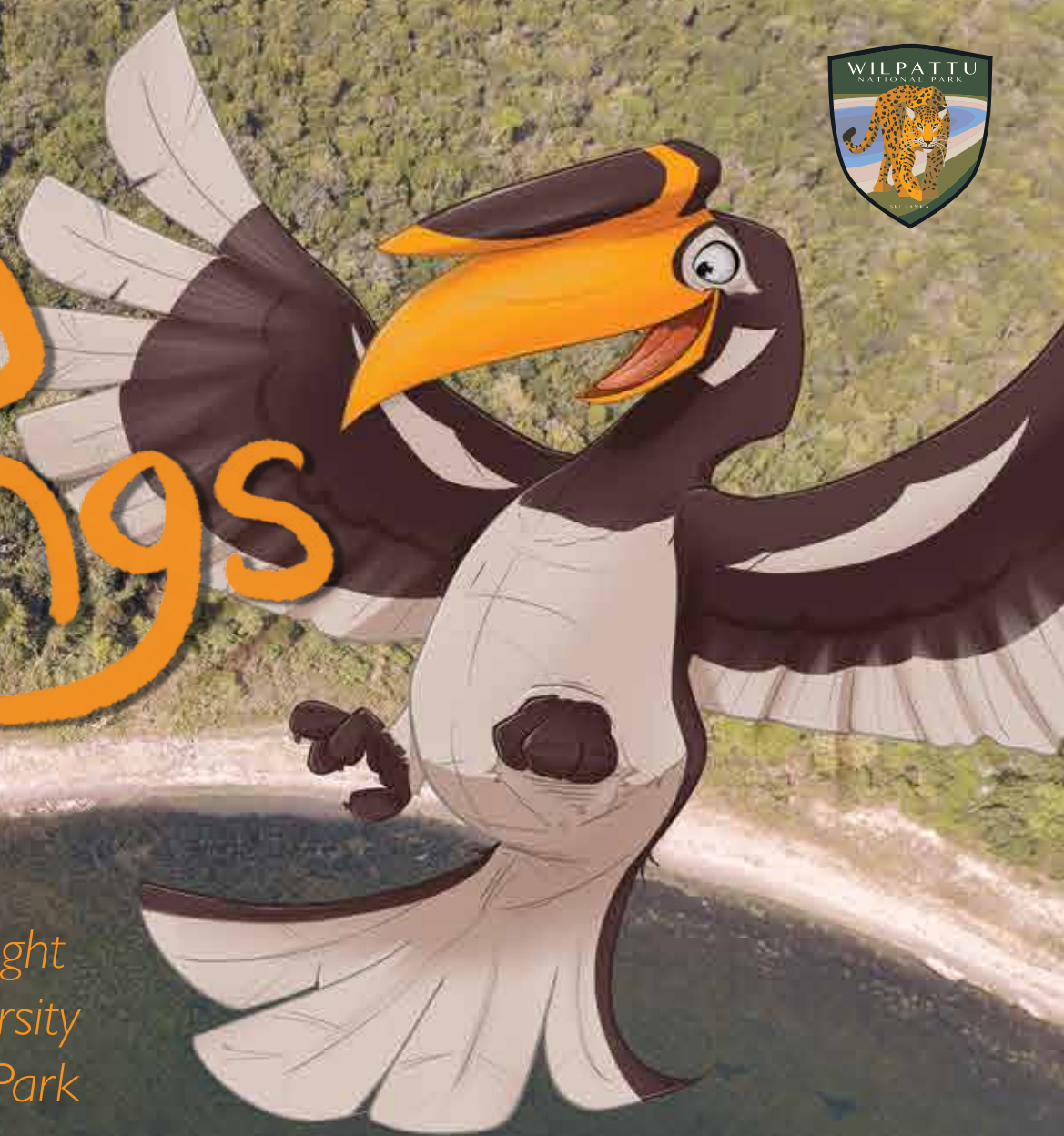




# Wild Wilpattu Wanderings



*A guided flight  
to discover the biodiversity  
of Wilpattu National Park*



Written & Photographed by Yanik Tissera  
Illustrated by Zev Landes  
(The Parrotfish Collective)

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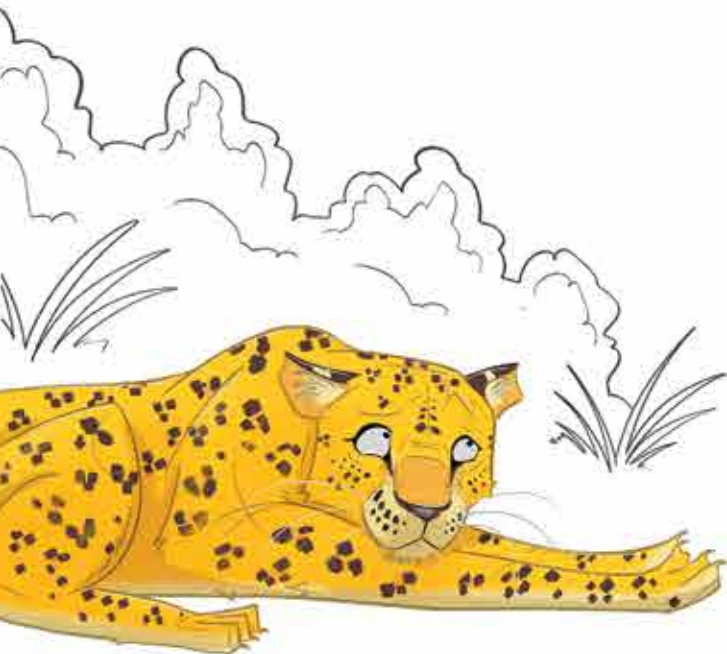
To the north and west  
Lies a jungle that's vast  
The dry zone habitat  
Of Wilpattu National Park

Huge is its size  
On this pearl of an isle  
Walking all around it  
May take a little while

If you do then you do  
But if you didn't really know  
It's 35 times  
The size of Colombo!

Mangroves, rivers,  
Villus and tanks  
Are just a few features  
That provide viewing banks

With leopard, bear  
And shamas that sing  
This gem of diversity  
Has got everything



*“Hi! My name is Herath the Hornbill.  
Come fly with me,  
let me show you around  
my beautiful home!”*



*Wilpattu is the largest and one of the oldest national parks in Sri Lanka. It was declared a sanctuary in 1905 and upgraded to 'National Park' status in 1938.*



*“Let’s start with some salty breeze in our feathers!”*

*Did you know that Wilpattu National Park stretches all the way to the ocean?*

*All sorts of different creatures live under and above the water -  
you’ll find marine mammals, fish and reptiles down there, and seabirds hovering above.*

*Look! There are a couple of sperm whales and a pod of spinner dolphins!”*





*Seagrasses are flowering plants, with stems and long grassy leaves. They form seagrass beds, which are underwater marine ecosystems that are found in shallow coastal waters or in the brackish waters of estuaries.*



To the west of the park  
There is an ocean of treats  
Of seagrass beds  
And coral reefs

Where marine mammals and fish  
Swim free and do thrive  
And some of the last dugongs  
Are still found alive

Yes, that's right!  
Dugongs are found here too  
- they can weigh up to 500kg  
and grow up to 10 feet long!

Their main food source  
are the seagrass beds!





*“As refreshing as the water is - it's not my natural habitat!*

*Ahhhh..... the best thing about soaring in the sky  
are the views. Look at that headland, what unusual colours  
- let's begin exploring this great land.”*



Woahh! A fossilized tooth  
from an extinct shark!



The Miocene Period refers to a period of time between 23 and 5 million years ago. Several species from this time are fossilized in the limestone around Kudiramalai Point.

Come a little closer  
See what I have found  
There are fossils right here  
Under this strange mound

Of extinct rays  
And sharks from the past  
And old coral bars  
Uncovered at last

For 23 million years  
It has been shown  
These fossils have existed  
In this Miocene limestone

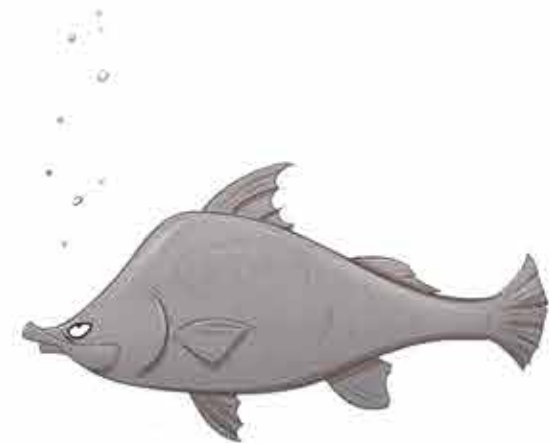


Mangrove forests  
Vast and strong  
Up the Kala Oya  
2 kilometres long

These sensitive forests  
Are quite profound  
They keep us healthy,  
Safe and sound

You see,  
Great big roots  
Hold onto mud  
Stopping big waves  
And sudden floods

Filtering water  
To keep things best  
It's a nursery for fish  
And birds to nest






Now here's a place  
you might not know about!

I don't visit the mangroves often,  
but I know how important these  
unique forests are.  
Do you know too?

*Mangroves not only sustain diverse flora and fauna but they also absorb pollutants, protect from coastline erosion, act as a buffer from storms and stabilize sediments.*

A large, stylized brown bird with a long, bright orange beak is shown in flight, soaring over a dense, lush green forest. The bird's wings are spread wide, and its tail feathers are visible. Below the forest, a winding river or stream is visible, reflecting the sunlight. The overall scene is vibrant and naturalistic.

*From one cool spot to another - only this one has fresh water!  
Let's dive down past that flock of storks and into the thick canopy,  
I can hear a bit of a ruckus.*



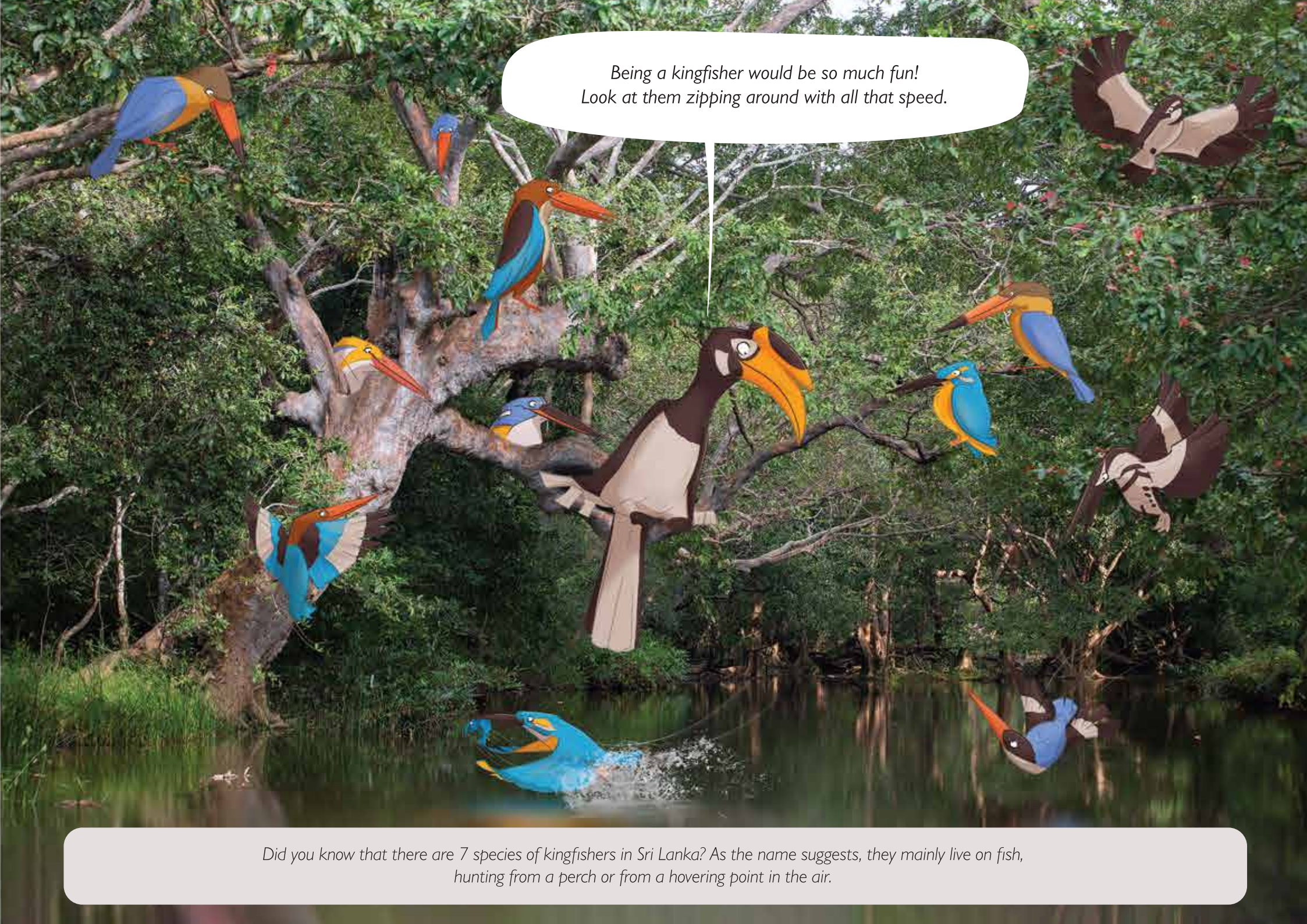


The Modaragam Aru  
Is the northernmost river  
A steady flow of water  
It will always deliver

You might find kingfishers  
Of all shapes and sizes  
Perched very patiently  
Awaiting fishy prizes

If it wasn't for these *kumbuks*  
It would be much hotter  
Keeping cool is advised  
Do it like that otter





Being a kingfisher would be so much fun!  
Look at them zipping around with all that speed.

Did you know that there are 7 species of kingfishers in Sri Lanka? As the name suggests, they mainly live on fish, hunting from a perch or from a hovering point in the air.

*From all that tree cover to no shade at all. It's hot out here in the grasslands!*

*Look at those herds of elephants and spotted deer!*

*How many can you count? Can you see those little ones too?*





Oh look - gardeners of the forest!  
I might be good at spreading seeds, but these guys  
- they do it on a mega scale!



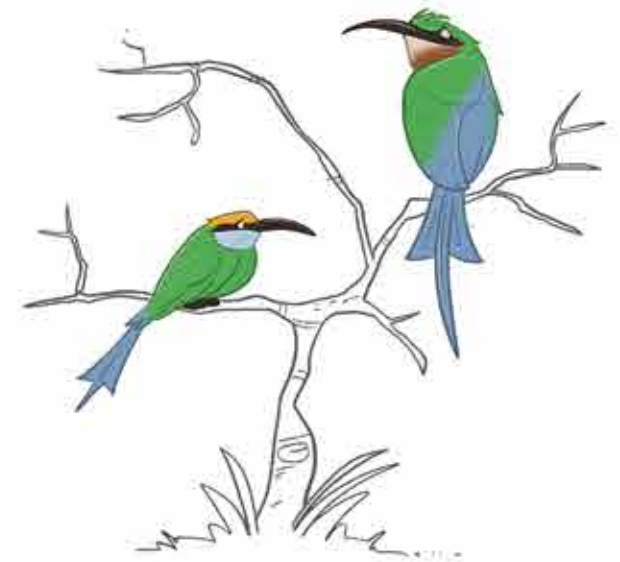
*Elephants are social, intelligent animals. The structure of the family unit is a safe place for the young to learn and play.  
The herd is made up of females and their calves, led by a matriarch.  
Males leave the herd as young adults and live alone or in other small herds of male elephants.*

This grassland patch  
Looks a lot of fun  
Check out that herd  
Lazing in the sun

What a great place  
For elephants to feed  
The entire herd  
The matriarch does lead

Now make no mistake  
This space is unique  
It comes out of nowhere  
So to speak

Like a field of gold  
It's rich with treasure  
The scale of which  
Is hard to measure









*My heart bursts with love for my jungle home - there is no place I would rather be. Look at those two brahminy kites!*

Depending on the time of year,  
the scrub jungles can look very different  
- lush and green, or dry and earthy.



Don't take for granted  
This scrubland thick and thorny  
Deciduous are its leaves  
With colours of tawny

Perfectly adapted  
To the dry zone heat  
These scrawny plants  
Are actually quite neat

The harshest conditions  
Are where they grow  
Obtaining plant nutrition  
Absorbing it slow



*Deciduous refers to trees and shrubs that shed their leaves annually. In the case of Wilpattu National Park, the seasonal shedding of leaves occurs in the drier months of the year.*



*A villu; the lifegiving basins of our forest  
- some of these hold water all year round, even in times of drought!  
These water holes are essential for all my wild friends' survival.*





*It's 9am! Do you know how to get your bearings?  
Which way is north?  
That's right, the shadows can give it away.  
But what about the sand?*

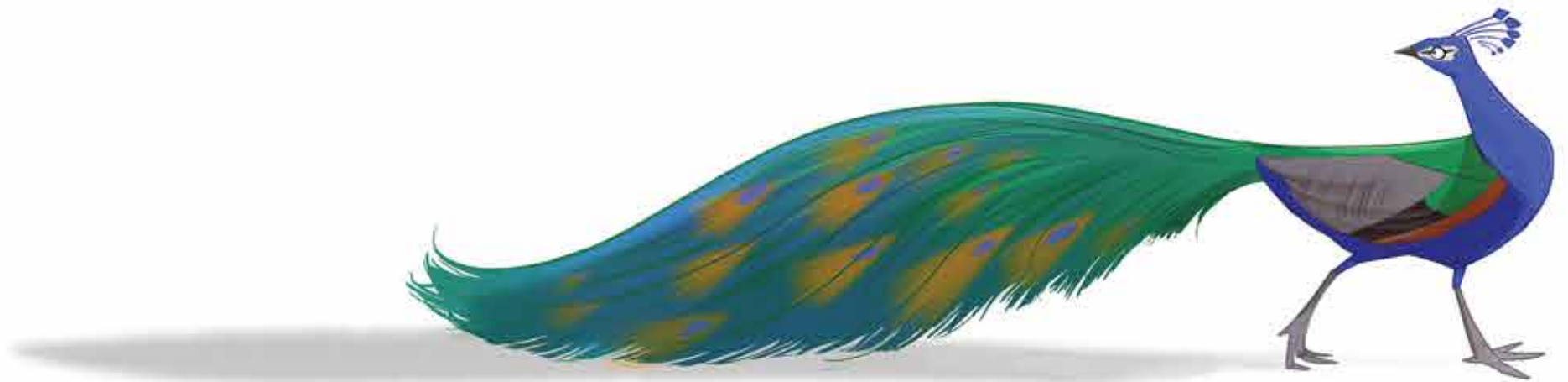


*Due to seasonal winds pushing from the southwest, many low dunes of sand have formed on the northeastern edges of most shallow villus. An easy way to get your bearings!!*

This jungle clearing  
With water abound  
Is a striking feature  
That has sand around

Arrive at a villu  
It won't cease to amaze  
The constant action  
Will entertain for days

A wetland home  
So rich and tidy  
It's not at all surprising  
It is so lively!



*I can bear-ly believe my eyes - it's a bear having breakfast!  
I hear they suck up termites from those mounds - Un-bear-lievable.*









*Unlike the scrubland, this evergreen forest  
doesn't lose leaves during the dry season.  
All the better for prey to hide from flying predators!*

*Oops, I may have spoken too soon!*

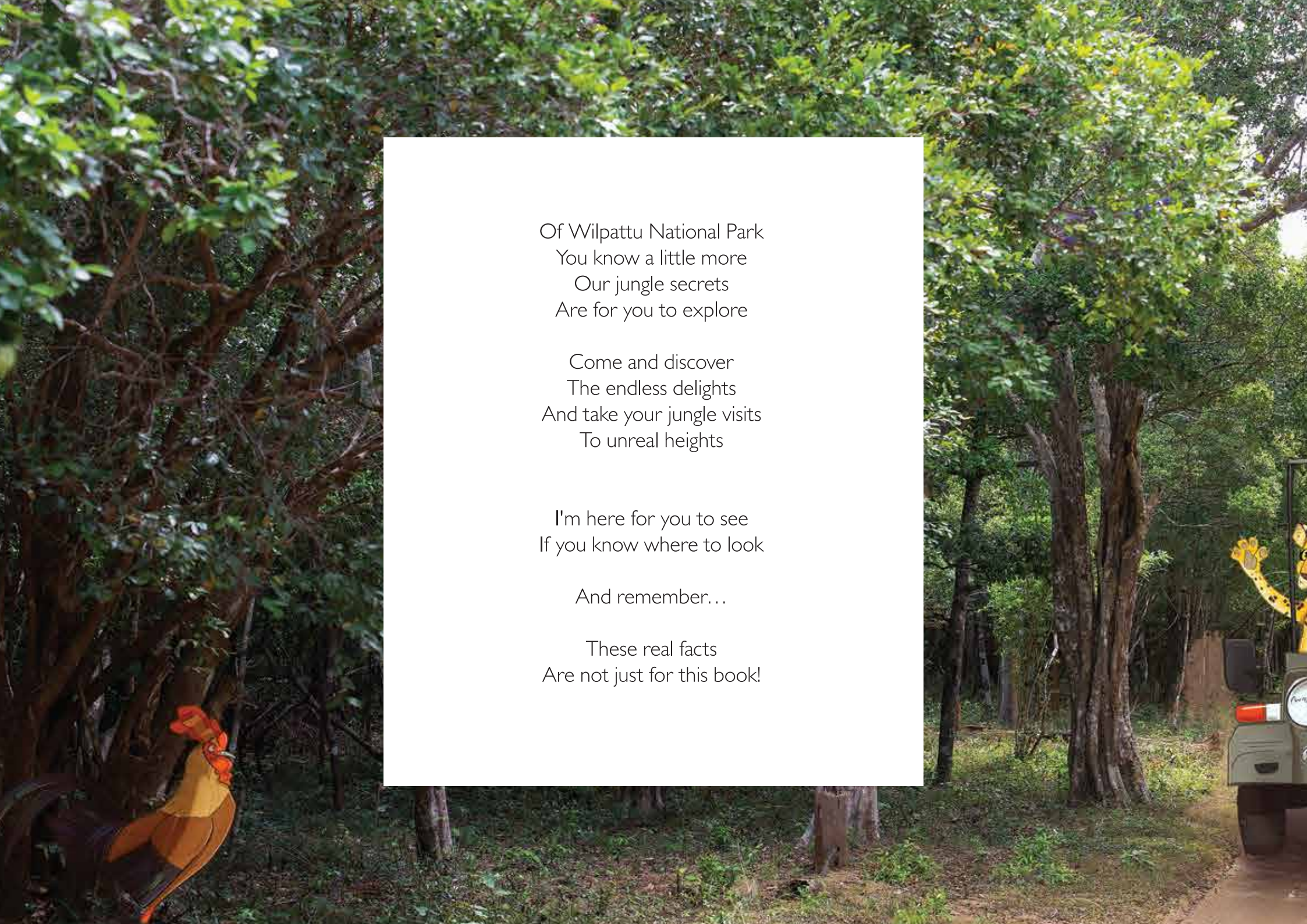
Enchanted forests  
Of magic not understood  
Is the place of timber trees  
*Palu* and *Satinwood*

Under the thick canopy  
No need to look elsewhere  
You might see a termite mound  
Visited by a bear

This home is rather magical  
Light rays piercing bright  
Brown earth soils  
Serpent-eagles in flight



*The crested serpent-eagle is often found around thick forest and preys mainly on reptiles such as lizards and snakes.*



Of Wilpattu National Park  
You know a little more  
Our jungle secrets  
Are for you to explore

Come and discover  
The endless delights  
And take your jungle visits  
To unreal heights

I'm here for you to see  
If you know where to look

And remember...

These real facts  
Are not just for this book!

*That's all for now - I hope you enjoyed  
learning more about my home!*

*There is so much more to know,  
so please do visit when you can.*

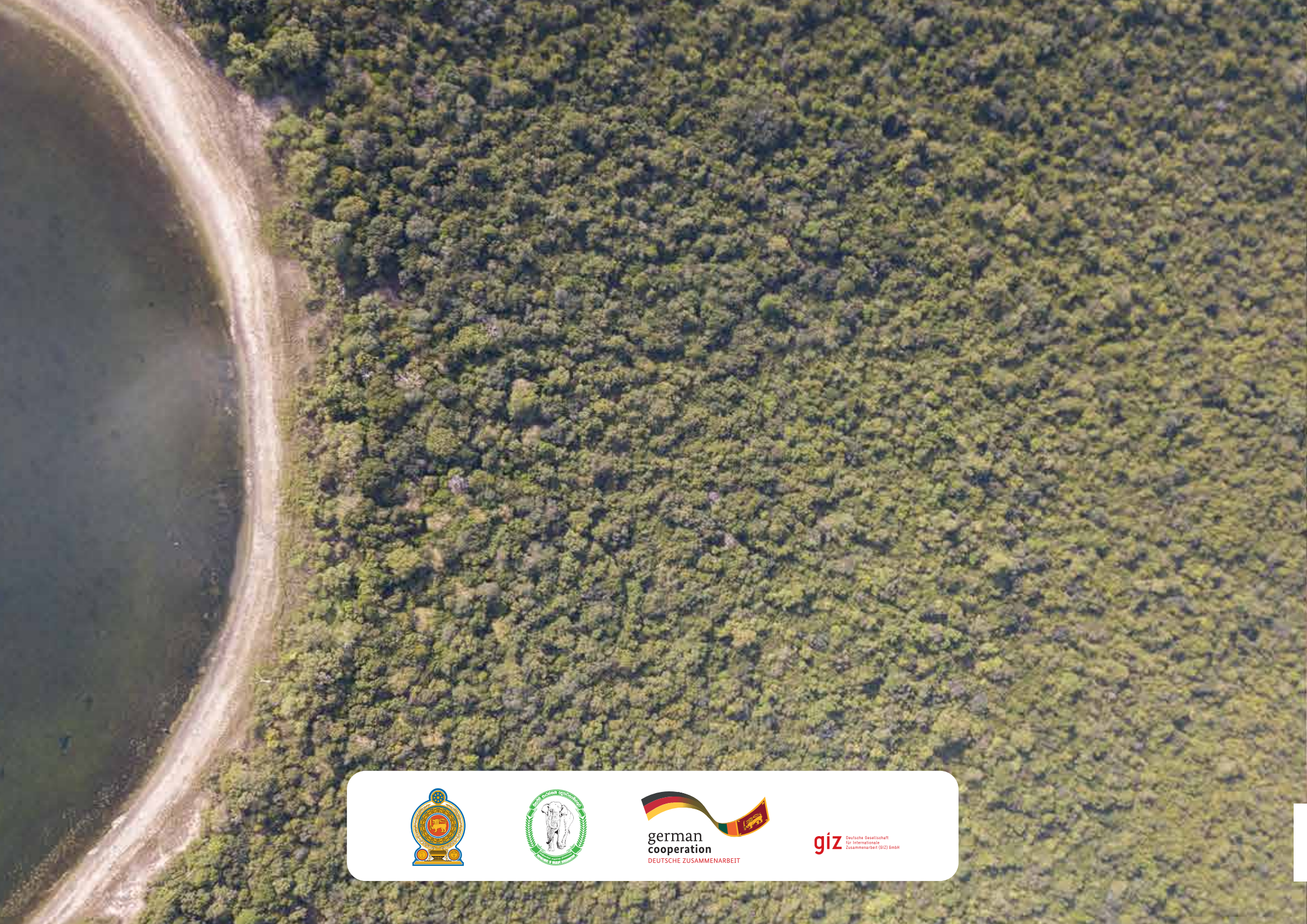
*As for me, I'm off on my next tour already!  
It never gets old...*

*Maybe I could be a park ranger?*









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