

# Reopening of the Renovated NIFS- Popham Arboretum as an Ecotourism Destination for the Nature Lovers 20 July 2023, Dambulla

The Ministry of Environment together with the National Institute of Fundamental Studies (NIFS) renovated and added value to the **Popham Arboretum, Dambulla** as an ecotourism destination and **reopened it on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2023** for the benefit of nature lovers. Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Secretary, Ministry of Education, Chairman, National Institute of Fundamental Studies, Staff of the both Ministries, Board Members of the NIFS and other invitees joined with this re-opening ceremony.



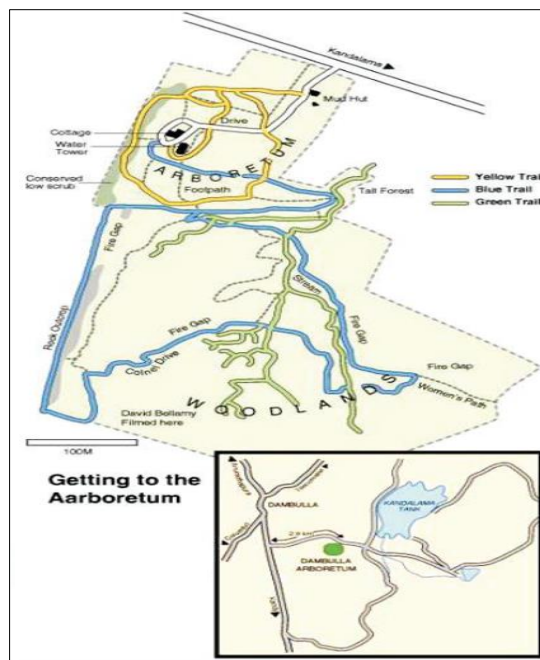


## **NIFS- Popham Arboretum:**

NIFS-Popham Arboretum is situated about two and half kilometres away from Dambulla on the Kandalama road. This unique site was owned by an Englishman, Mr. F. H. (Sam) Popham, who gifted it to NIFS in 1989 to carry out research and educational activities.

Original site bought by Popham in 1963 was a seven and half acre-scrub jungle. Popham allowed the indigenous tree saplings in the site to emerge and establish by removing the 'weedy' shrubs around them. Consequently, the original scrub jungle was turned into a tall woodland with a closed canopy. After taking over the land in 1989, NIFS bought and added another 27 acres of adjoining scrub land and expanded the arboretum. Popham's method of "Assisted Natural Regeneration (ANR)" was practiced in this land.

*(Note: NIFS- National Institute of Fundamental Studies)*



**Location map of Popham's Arboretum, Dambulla**



## **The Arboretum and Tourist's attraction:**

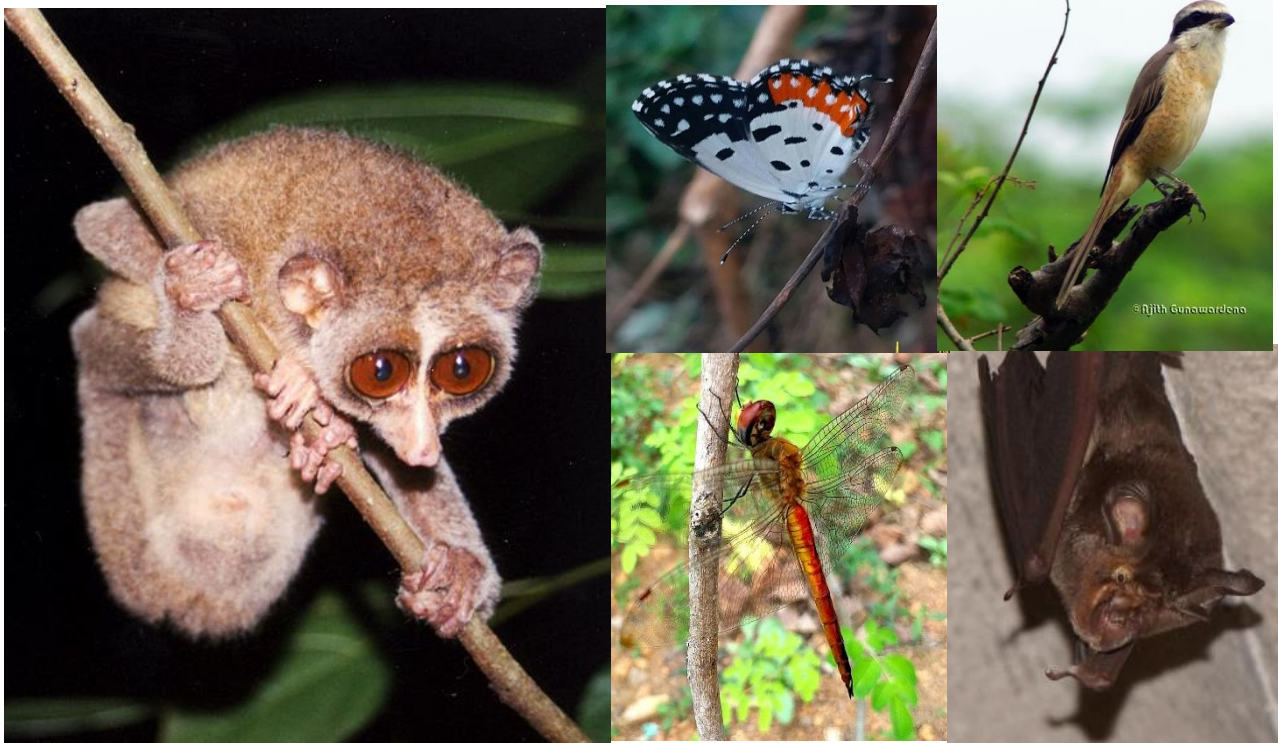
This arboretum is visited by many local and overseas researchers for educational purposes and ecological research. It is also a popular tourist destination owing to the presence of unique fauna such as Slender Loris, Pangolin and a rich vegetation consisting of over 300 species of plants.

It is located in between Kandalama Hotel and Dambulla town on the Kandalama Dambulla road. This is an ideal place for the foreign tourists to visit and spend some time in a very peaceful soothing environment. Furthermore, following description highlights this key factors for tourist attraction.

## Eco-tourism potentials in the site:

### *High diversity of Fauna*

This Arboretum serves as a home to a variety of animals and birds. Within the premises, a wide variety of bird species such as endemic jungle fowl, grey hornbill, brown capped babbler, blue faced malkoha, blue tailed bee-eater, paradise flycatcher and some unique animals like slender loris and pangolin can be seen. Popham arboretum is also known for its variety of butterflies and dragonflies. 25 species of mammals including bats, 83 species of birds including some migrants 77 species of butterflies and 12 species of dragonflies have been recorded to be residing in the arboretum. Also, this is the popular destination for Gecko Watching of high end nature based tourists.



### *Flora at Arboretum:*

NIFS Popham Arboretum functions as a restoration site for several valuable and endangered indigenous plant species. Some common trees found within the area are Ebony (*Diospyros ebenum*), Satinwood (*Chloroxylon swietenia*), Halmilla (*Berrya cordifolia*), Hulanhik (*Chukrasia tabuensis*) and Mee (*Madhuca longifolia*). Several valuable trees and shrubs with medicinal value are also found here. Some of them are: Neem, Bo-mee, Ankenda, Na and Ratmal. The arboretum is a home to about 100 species of timber trees and about 70 species of medicinal plants.

Altogether there are over 350 plants species belonging to 83 families with herbs, climbers and parasites.

This arboretum encompasses a very high tree density with a closed canopy cover while offering a very cool microclimate. Forest bathing is one of the very popular concepts of originated in Japan and it is scientifically proven as providing many health benefits. As a dry zone forest, there is a very high potential to develop this location as a site for “forest bathing” and ultimately it will lead to generate more income from the tourists.



## Activities Available for Visitors in the Arboretum:

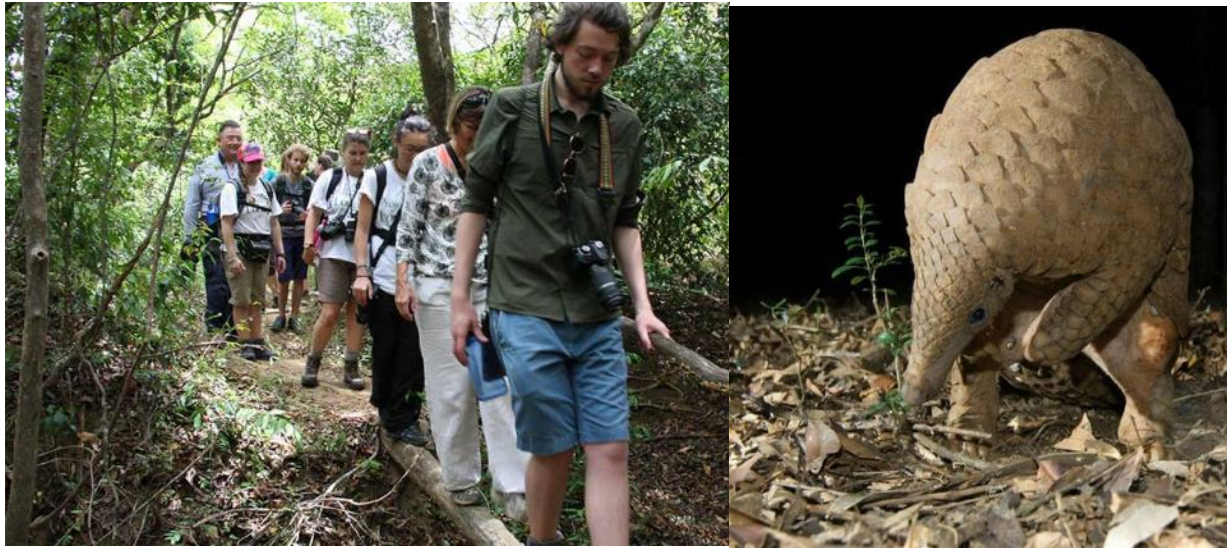
- **Day Safari at Popham Arboretum**

This arboretum is well established with properly guided nature trails and visitors can walk through all nature trails without any assistance. Four nature trails (Green trail, blue trail, pink trail and yellow trail) have been set up for day time walks. These trails are marked and well maintained with colour bands and numbered arrows for self-navigation around the arboretum. Day walks are ideal for bird and butterfly watching, viewing forest trees & mushroom and to gain a forest bathing experience.



- **Night Safari at Popham Arboretum**

Night safaris mainly focus on Grey Slender Loris (*Loris lydekkerianus*) and Pangolin (*Manis crassicaudata*) watching. Walks are arranged with a tour guide and is open from 7.00 pm to 10.00 pm. This activity is very popular among the nature lovers and it helps to get additional income to the country.



- **Camping at Popham Arboretum**

The arboretum is having a very attractive camp site which is in a beautifully designed location, adjacent to a stream which provides water at least 10 months of the year. A camp site is available for a maximum of 25 people. Two washrooms with toilets and bathrooms are available for visitors. Campers can hire tents, or can use their own tents for camping. Barbecue facilities are also available in the camp site. The camping site is available for interested parties through prior reservations.



## Lodging at Popham Arboretum

Rooms are available for accommodation. Three rooms with ensuites are available for overnight stay. The extra-large room can accommodate 05, large room can accommodate 03, and small room can accommodate 02 visitors respectively.



## Research at the Popham Arboretum

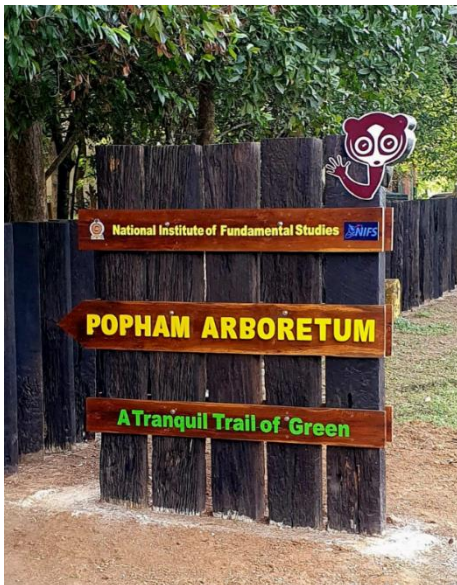
Depending on the researcher's interest, projects can focus on dry zone vegetation, restoration ecology, animal behaviour, microorganisms, carbon sequencing and taxonomic studies on flora and fauna.



Considering the importance of the site, the Ministry of Environment has identified this site as one of the sites which will be developed for promoting ecotourism mainly targeted for foreign tourists. This type of developments are very much valuable to earn foreign currency to the country and popularize the country's richness in biodiversity to the world.

Accordingly, Ministry of Environment provided funds to National Institute of Fundamental Studies and following activities were carried out.

- Established name board at the main entrance
- Renovated fence in an environment friendly manner
- Constructed 10' x 10' ticket counter at the entrance
- Established the Popham museum
- Renovated the auditorium
- Improved the facilities for the open lecture area
- Improved the outdoor conference facilities with furniture arrangements
- Renovated the information centre with digital equipment
- Constructed new toilets and renovated existing toilets
- Renovated the trail Directions
- Prepared high quality information booklet specially targeting for foreign tourists & developed a video documentary



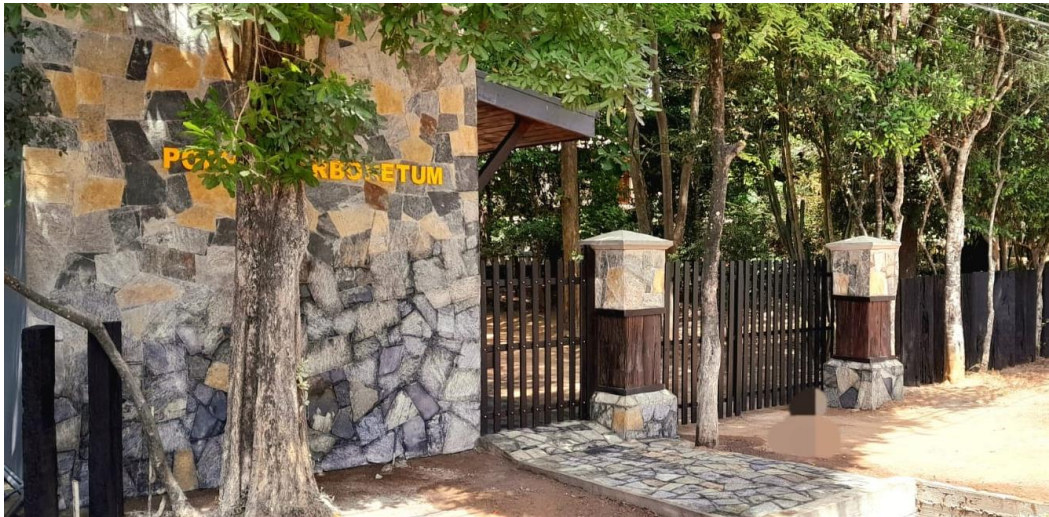
**Constructed name board at the main entrance**



**Renovated fence**



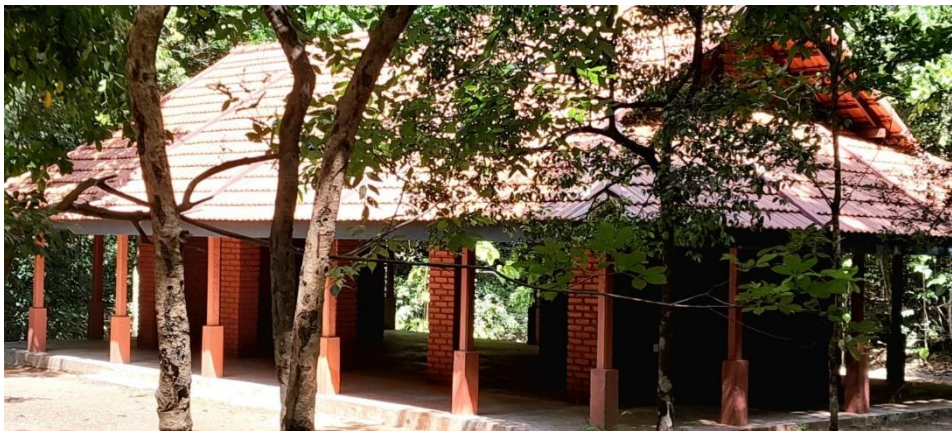
**Established the Popham museum**



**Renovated the main gate**



**Constructed the ticket counter**



**Renovated the auditorium**



**Improved the facilities for the open lecture area**



**Improved the outdoor conference facilities**



**Renovated the trail directions**



**Constructed new toilets**