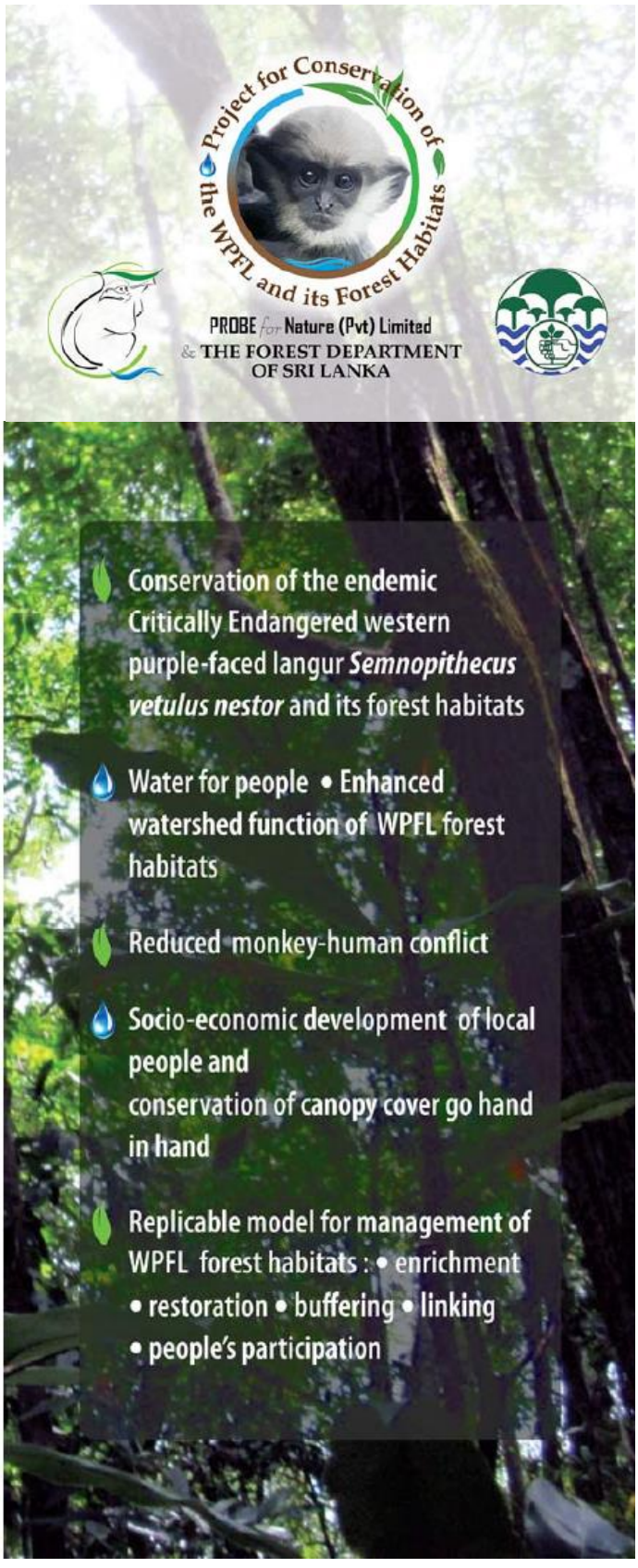
BE A CATALYST FOR CHANGE !

Help Restore Sri Lanka's Fragmented Rainforests and Save the Critically Endangered Western Purple-Faced Langur



Sri Lanka's rich biodiversity is not only a national treasure—it's a gateway to sustainable economic growth and innovation. This multi-faceted initiative offers a unique opportunity for forward-thinking businesses and financial institutions to lead in environmental stewardship, and demonstrate real conservation impact that enhances credibility and brand value.

This concept note outlines a high-impact conservation and community engagement initiative in Sri Lanka's rainforest fragments. It invites private sector partners to co-invest in conserving the Western Purple-Faced Langur—our flagship Critically Endangered endemic species, and its forested habitats, while supporting nature-based tourism, climate resilience, and sustainable local enterprises.

By engaging with us, you will partner with top-tier Sri Lankan scientists and institutions, including the Forest Department, to drive pioneering conservation solutions. Together, we can also mitigate human-monkey conflict, restore rainforest ecosystems, and create food forest gardens to link and buffer fragmented forests, with the help of empowered local communities.

Strengthen your competitive edge. Be where business success meets environmental impact. By investing in Sri Lanka's unique natural heritage, you will not only drive innovation and economic growth Your support will also promote nature-based tourism and help build a new generation of skilled environmental professionals to lead future conservation and sustainable development in the country, and support the bio-economy.

Why Our Initiative Matters !

Sri Lanka's lowland tropical rainforests in the western lowlands are **biodiversity hotspots and the last refuge** of the Critically Endangered and endemic **western purple-faced langur**, along with the toque macaque, many other small mammals, rare birds, and endemic fauna and flora. Our work focuses on restoring and managing these forests to form enriched and linked small forest systems in **Ecological Networks,** which not only protect wildlife but also enhances climate resilience and ensures water security

Innovate to conserve the Critically Endangered western purple-faced langur (WPFL) and its diminishing small wet zone forest habitats with people's participation

Background: Monkeys and their forest habitats are a valuable part of Sri Lanka's natural capital. Our initiative focuses on the conservation of the western purple-faced langur (WPFL)—an endemic and Critically Endangered primate—restricted to the biologically rich western wet lowlands of Sri Lanka. Listed among the 25 most endangered primates in the world, the WPFL is threatened by rapid habitat loss, particularly the destruction of tree cover in village gardens, which serve as its primary habitat for historic reasons. The lack of sizable forests in its range further exacerbates this issue.

The only hope for this langur lies in the restoration, enrichment, buffering, and linking of its small forest habitats to form viable "Ecological Networks". This requires a "landscape approach" with active management of degraded and fragmented forests, using village home gardens and rubber plantations to buffer and connect them, with the active participation of local communities. Since monkeys are often viewed as crop raiders, it is crucial to offer tangible benefits to local people participating in conservation ventures, such as alleviating monkey-related crop damage and enhancing household income.

Our initiative is located in and around the Indikada Mukalana Forest Reserve (IMFR)—one of the last remaining rainforest patches in the Colombo district—lying adjacent to the Labugama forest at Waga. It aims to create a model for the conservation of the WPFL and its degraded forest habitats, with the participation of local communities. The initiative employs an innovative approach that includes primate and vegetation research, forest restoration, minimizing human-monkey conflict, local livelihood development, and branding ecotourism. Strategic use of education and communication further supports these goals. Additionally, this initiative pilot tests socio-economic upliftment for local communities in exchange for their help in forest restoration, expansion, buffering and linking—to be upscaled elsewhere.

By restoring small rainforest fragments and enhancing their ecosystem services, this initiative will provide more food for the WPFL our Critically Endangered flagship species, thereby reducing human-monkey conflict. The broader benefits of this initiative include the conservation of Sri Lanka's lowland rainforest biodiversity and the protection of watersheds supplying water to much of the local population. It also provides vital opportunity to build a new generation of much-needed multiskilled environmental professionals in the country.

OUR ULTIMATE GOAL: Conservation of the Critically Endangered western purple-faced langur (WPFL) and its forested habitats.

OBJECTIVE: Establish a viable and innovative model for conservation of the WPFL and its forested habitats, while **reducing monkey-human conflict, with people's participation.**

WHAT WAS DONE UNDER PHASE I?

During 2007-2010, Dr Jinie Dela and Dr U.K.G.K Padmalal (Open University), in collaboration with the Forest Department, carried out a comprehensive 7000+ km survey of the historic range of the WPFL in six administrative districts. The survey included spot-checks for the WPFL, rapid interviews with local people, and detailed household interviews where the langur was spotted. The team visited over 70 forests and traversed 46 on foot. This work was carried out by **PROBE** *for* **Nature (Pvt)** Limited, with the support of 35 Forest Department field staff and 18 volunteers who worked with the initiative's core staff and primate experts. The survey:

- **Re-defined** the current geographic range of the WPFL.
- **Identified** forests where the WPFL still exists (*though not limited to these areas*).
- **Pinpointed** major threats to the WPFL across its range, along with key sites of serious monkey-human conflict.
- **Revealed** that habitat loss for the WPFL was largely due to fragmentation of home gardens, which reduces canopy cover and traps the monkeys in tree-rich non-forest areas; escalating human-monkey conflict.
- **Showed** that home gardens and rubber plantations cannot now support viable long-term populations of the WPFL, nor can their small, isolated, and degraded forest habitats, which have insufficient food for the monkeys, and are surrounded by land with minimal or no canopy cover.
- **Revealed** that ensuring the survival of the WPFL requires managing its forest habitats in "Ecological Networks," where these fragmented forests are restored, and buffered/connected by tree-rich non-forest matrices, with active participation from local communities.

WHAT IS PROPOSED ?

- Continuing pioneering research (Phase II) on the behaviour and social organization of forest-living WPFL and sympatric macaques in the Indikada Mukalana Forest Reserve (IMFR), focusing on their forest use and food preferences. This is supported by vegetation and forest condition studies in the 573 ha IMF, consisting of four fragments. By surveying on foot, using LiDAR data, and mapping vegetation types, the team will gather key information on: (a) areas with high-quality rainforest to remain undisturbed, (b) natural forest areas needing assisted natural regeneration (ANR), (c) forest plantations to be enriched with monkey food species, and (d) potential ecotourism and visitor facility sites. Upscaling these findings to other small WPFL habitats will be an important outcome.
- Supporting the Forest Department with strategic forest restoration using WPFL and macaque food species identified through research.

- With the participation of the Forest Department, engaging local communities to pilot innovative community-based livelihood initiatives in return for "connectivity conservation". This includes local enterprise development through private sector partnerships for skills development and gaining market access for products and services. Supported enterprises include: tree rich "food forest gardens" near or between forest fragments, niche tea under "forest" (hand rolled tea), organic agriculture, shade-loving spices (ginger, turmeric and cardamom), beekeeping, and the use of invasive bamboo for high-end handicrafts. This will provide a tested model for sustained community participation in linking and buffering degraded wet zone forest fragments.
- Investigating nature-based tourism potential in the IMFR with the Forest Department. The forest offers unique opportunities for birding and an authentic forest ecotourism experience *just 1-hr from Colombo*. New tourism experiences focused on primates and biodiversity-rich habitats will be developed, including forest bathing, immersive "forester/primatologist for a day" experiences, nature trails, and a small visitor centre with digital tech (if funding allows). A community sales outlet, craft demos, cookery workshops, and a high-quality restaurant run by local people. are proposed.
- Developing schools' programmes on primate and forest conservation, and home gardening; including teacher training for participatory environmental education.
- Postgraduate training for young people in primate and vegetation research, trends in biodiversity conservation, community mobilization, reporting, and other essential skills (including soft skills) for top quality environmental professionals.

WHY WE ARE CAPABLE OF DELIVERING RESULTS

- We think and act differently, and are able to draw on a wide array of partners to reach the goals and targets of this initiative. Dr Jinie Dela (team leader, coordinator and principle investigator), primatologist and ecologist, pioneered research on the WPFL in the 1980s, and has 40 years experience on WPFL ecology and behaviour in human-modified environments and forests, and on monkey-human conflict. She also brings to this initiative her long-term experiences on forest and biodiversity conservation, education and communication, climate change, Protected Areas—including World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves, landscape management planning, nature-based tourism planning, and community participation for forest conservation.
- Dr U.K.G.K. Padmalal (co-investigator) a zoologist with overseas training in park planning and ecology, has over 40 years of experience in biodiversity surveys, and has worked on the red slender loris. Prof Siril Wijesundara, one of Sri Lanka's highly experienced and leading botanists, serves as an advisor and collaborator.
- Chinthaka Ganegama Hakmanage, holding an M Phil in Remote Sensing and GIS from the University of Aberdeen *(supported with project data)*, leads mapping and spatial data analysis. Sangeeth Silva, now a volunteer, with an M Phil on forest WPFL behaviour and ecology *from this initiative,* is one of its most valuable outputs. The Forest Department, with a strong record in forest restoration and participatory conservation, plays a central role—helping to institutionalise the initiative's outputs and outcomes.The collaboration between primate experts, botanists, mapping specialists, forest managers and the local community provides this initiative with a solid foundation for success.
- A key anticipated outcome is the development of a new generation of biodiversity professionals—young graduates trained in primatology, ecology, community engagement, communication, and conservation, who can serve as strong

ambassadors for primate and forest protection and sustainable development. Already, this initiative has supported an M Phil in Primate Behaviour, and a postgraduate diploma in Remote Sensing from the Indian Institute of Remote Sensing—(IIRS) which progressed to an M Phil in the UK.

- This initiative is designed for the long term, based on models of successful primate conservation initiatives that have continued for decades. It thus aims to become self-sustaining beyond the ending of external funding. Phase I was supported by Primate Conservation Incorporated (PCI), USA, and Mathhydropower Ltd; Phase II by PCI and Sri Lanka's National Science Foundation (NSF); and PCI continues to provide seed funding for Phase III.

- The activities we propose are measurable in the long term and will bring together a varied range of partners to achieve the multiple goals, objectives, outcomes and outputs of this initiative.

- After many setbacks due to COVID-19, our initiative is now committed to resuming activities with renewed energy and focus to achieve conservation of the WPFL and its forest habitats and beyond!







HOW CAN YOU PARTNER ?

- A business model is required to support the scientific work we do, as we aim to move beyond mere research and forest restoration to achieve conservation goals, by implementing innovative means for socio-economic upliftment and the wellbeing of local communities as conditional benefits for those who are vital partners in our initiative.

- We welcome different tiers of partnership, for the various types of support needed (i.e. helping to build a business model for conditional benefits; research funding to obtain vital data, skills training for local people, purchase of land to expand, link and buffer the IMFR, branding, market access for products, promoting ecotourism and associated programmes, education and communication, sponsorship of young professionals gaining post graduate success through the project, etc.)

- *Funding and partnerships are being sought to realise the full potential of this ambitious and innovative initiative.*

Contact us for more information through 94 038 2241732 or wpflrc@gmail.com

Annex 1: SUMMARY OF EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS *(some outputs have already been achieved)*

Outcome 1: **Enriched and linked small forest habitats for the WPFL managed as Ecological Networks**

- **Output 1.1:** Comprehensive research data on WPFL and macaque food species and preferred forest habitats to guide forest restoration.
- **Output 1.2:** Forest restoration,/rehabilitation/enrichment/rewilding to create viable habitats for the WPFL/other wildlife and reduce human-monkey conflict

Outcome 2: Sustained community commitment to link, buffer, enrich, and restore WPFL forest and home garden habitats

- **Output 2.1:** A pilot tested business model for **s**kills training and markets for high quality products to support livelihood development in return for as conditional benefits (incentives) for people maintaining canopy cover in their lands (*i.e. by way of "food forest gardens" (FFG) using "permaculture" principles, spices under canopy, apiculture, hand rolled organic forest tea, bamboo handicrafts, etc.).*
- **Output 2.2:** Functional *Vandhura, Vanaya saha Viyana* (VVV) small groups/CBOs for enterprise development and sustained community commitment.
- **Output 2.3:** Short-term benefits for participating local people through training in home garden management, organic vegetable gardening, cultivation of timber and fruit trees, schools' programmes, and establishment of a FFG demonstration plot and model home gardens

Outcome 3: A model for self-sustained long-term conservation of the WPFL and its forest habitats, enabled through research, education, strategic communication, and ecotourism initiatives at the IMFR, with people's participation and the engagement of trained young professionals.

- **Output 3.1:** A Conservation, Education, Research, Visitor services and Ecotourism (CERVE) Centre, to support integrated conservation action.
- **Output 3.2**: Ecotourism development in the IMFR and surrounding home gardens for high-end tourists, based on a tourism plan *(with novel and innovative nature-based tourism programmes for different target groups, well-trained local guides with excellent interpretation skills; novel campsites, nature trails, canopy walk, experiential and immersive packages for visitors including community tourism –with advice for local people on home stays, services, lifestyle packages, etc.).*
- **Output 3.3:** Well-trained, qualified, and motivated young researchers/community mobilisers capable of spearheading biodiversity conservation and
- sustainable development in Sri Lanka.
- **Output 3.4:** A Management Plan for the proposed Indikada Mukalana National Biosphere Reserve, complete with zonation for different forest activities.
- **Output 3.5** Special programmes and materials for targeted education and awareness, developed under a Strategic Communication Plan.

Outcome 4: **Reduced crop raiding by monkeys around the Indikada Mukalana Forest Reserve**

- **Output 4.1:** Knowledge and techniques to reduce crop damage by monkeys tested and provided to local people.
- **Output 4.2:** Expertise built in the community to alleviate human-monkey conflict in general, and macaque crop raiding in particular.

Outcome 5: A pilot tested model to manage small forest systems providing refuge to the WPFL with people's participation

- **Output 5.2**: The piloted model at the IMFR is up-scaled to at least one other site to establish WPFL and/or other wildlife refuges *(through*
- *restoration: regeneration, rehabilitation, rewilding; and linking and buffering forest fragments with people's participation).*
- **Output 5.3**: The IMFR and surrounding areas are recognized as a National Man and Biosphere Reserve, serving as a model to promote the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve concept in Sri Lanka and advance the restoration and management of rainforest fragments in Ecological Networks.