



## THE NATIONAL TRUST – SRI LANKA

DR ROLAND SILVA MEMORIAL LECTURE – Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 6.00 pm

### **“Serendipity: The Discovery of Sri Lanka’s Biodiversity Heritage”**

**By Dr. Rohan Pethiyagoda**

**The Monthly Lecture Series No: 147 of the National Trust**

**Link to join the Zoom meeting:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81249396683>

Sri Lanka’s natural wealth—its species, landscapes and ecosystems—are justly celebrated in it being recognized as part of a Global Biodiversity Hotspot. Yet, we rarely stop to wonder how this incredible heritage came to be discovered. This lecture tells the tale of this voyage of discovery: the doctors and the housewives who became botanical explorers; a village lad who rose to number among Asia’s most famous illustrators; a tea planter who went on to become president of the Royal Entomological Society... In the course of his career, the speaker has delved into archives in both Sri Lanka and Europe to piece together the life stories of these remarkable men and women. In this lecture he celebrates their achievements and their all too human foibles: their rivalries, jealousies, eccentricities and not least, their genius. Richly illustrated with portraits, works of art and anecdotes, the lecture will relate the story of the explorations that led to the discoveries that in turn gave rise to the literature upon which knowledge of our living island is based upon. In short, the speaker explains how deserving it is that the phenomenon of serendipity takes its name from the classical moniker for Sri Lanka.



**Rohan Pethiyagoda** was educated at St Thomas’s Prep School, St Thomas’s College, Kings’ College, London, and the University of Sussex. In 1987, aged 31, he resigned his positions as Director of Biomedical Engineering Services in the Ministry of Health and Chairman of the Water Resources Board to explore Sri Lanka’s biodiversity. He used the proceeds of his first book, *The freshwater fishes of Sri Lanka* (1991) to endow the Wildlife Heritage Trust, a foundation dedicated to biodiversity exploration. This work, by Pethiyagoda and his colleagues of the Wildlife Heritage Trust, led to the discovery of more than 100 species new to science. He is the author of some 60 scientific papers and several books, and his achievement has been recognized by the award of the Rolex Award for Enterprise, the Linnean Medal and other honours, as well as by appointment as Deputy Chair of the IUCN Species Survival Commission. He is a Research Associate of the Australian Museum and an editor of the journal *Zootaxa*, in addition to being a strident advocate of good government.

**The National Trust – Sri Lanka conducts monthly lectures generally on the last working Thursday of each month. The lectures are open to the members and the general public. The HNB Sustainability Foundation is the principal sponsor of the events of the National Trust – Sri Lanka.**

Further information can be obtained from the Trust Office Tel.0112682730/ 0719566929