



*Vanilla planifolia*



*Vanilla moonii* - native to Sri Lanka



*Baikiaea Insignis*

# Halgolla Plantation Home

Accommodation of a different kind

- December 2011 -

The busiest month in the year is upon us! While we look forward to the guests who will be with us during December, it's also time for our annual Christmas Party, the biggest single event for those who work with and for us at HPH and the plantation enterprise that goes with it. Primarily for employees and their children, the party has now expanded to include friends and their children who so enjoy joining in the festivities! This year we expect about 50 men, women and children. We'll probably pop in a few pictures from what promises to be yet another memorable evening into the first newsletter for 2012.

More of our avian monsoon visitors are in evidence and I've heard the call of the **real** harbinger of the northeast monsoon, the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) who is so shy of displaying its beautiful iridescent plumage that it tends to skulk in the undergrowth, scuttling hither and yon in search of the insects that constitute its diet. How a bird with such a halting flight makes the long journey from the Himalayas where it breeds to our shores never ceases to amaze us, though we are so glad it does year after year!



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The rains continue to fall lightly, ideal for the plants in our garden. We've almost completed the listing of trees in the immediate vicinity of the house and began listing the flowering plants as well. However, that labour had to be abandoned in short order because there were, literally, hundreds of them to catalogue. Instead, we will make available a copy of the *Illustrated field guide to the flowers of Sri Lanka* by Jacob and Johanna de Vlas for the perusal of our guests!

Our King Coconut palms continue to provide us with their fabled water; its tender kernel, with *kithul jaggery*<sup>1</sup> sprinkled on it makes a truly unique snack, a cross between a dessert and a fresh fruit dish! We hope soon to persuade a neighbor to "tap" the flowers of the *Kithul* palm which will then give us our own private supply of Sweet Toddy, *Kithul* treacle and *Kithul jaggery*.

We have another batch of Lovi Lovi fruit wine maturing and still more fruit on the tree. We will continue to turn fruit in excess of our consumption requirements in its fresh form into jams, jellies and preserves. The selection right now includes Mango Chutney and Guava-, Lovi Lovi- and Nutmeg-based jellies. As you might imagine, since these are products from our own garden, their supply varies depending on the time of year. Most of the time though we have several available for visitors. We've even been known to give them the odd bottle as a memento of their visit to HPH!

We've begun the second phase of the vanilla cultivation and visitors may be interested to see how these vines are trained onto their supports. Soon there will be flowers to pollinate on these plants that belong to the orchid family and produce, next to saffron, the most expensive spice in the world!

We are planning to cantilever a platform off our front compound and, when that happens, visitors will have yet another place to sit out under the stars and the luxuriant foliage and flowers of the *Tabebuia* and *Baikiaea* trees.

Warm wishes for the holiday season and the new year.  
Emil & Arlene

<sup>1</sup> Palm sugar cake derived from the sap of *Caryota urens*

**For information or to book your accommodation, contact us at:**

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## Upcoming events in the country

### December

December is National Bird Month in Sri Lanka. In addition to the resident birds, the migrants have arrived from the Himalayas and will stay until April.

December 10 - Unduvap Poya – this religious full-moon holiday marks the arrival of the sapling of the bo-tree into Sri Lanka.

Adam's Peak – Sri Pada is an important pilgrimage for many Sri Lankans. Unduvap Poya day marks the start of the pilgrimage season which continues until May.

Christmas in the tropics! Colombo in particular gets all dolled up for Christmas. Though there's no snow and no cold, Santa, parties, Christmas shopping and cheer abound.

New Year's Eve is another event celebrated with great enthusiasm around the country.

Hot Air Balloon Rides at Dambulla and Sigiriya

Whale and Dolphin-Watching at Kalpitiya and Mirissa

White-water rafting at Kitulgala

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### January

January 15: Thai Pongal – Tamils in Sri Lanka celebrate this harvest festival with various activities. The celebrations give thanks to the Sun God for a good harvest.



January 18-22: The 6th annual HSBC Galle Literary Festival featuring a wide variety of local and international authors and other events.

No date: Kala pola: an open air art feast in Colombo featuring the art of very talented Sri Lankans



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