The prehistoric faunal diversity of eastern Sri Lanka revealed through the Rajagala archaeological excavation

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Abstract

Rajagala is the largest Buddhist monastery complex found in Sri Lanka which spreads across 1025 acres. It is located in Uhana Divisional Secretariat area, in the district of Ampara of Eastern Province, Sri Lanka. For the first time in the history, prehistoric excavations have now been extended to the eastern part of the country and the first ever site is *Rajagala Maha lena,* which is the largest cave in the site. Since there are no early records, it is a query whether the prehistoric eastern part of Sri Lanka was inhabited by the similar faunal species found from the other dry zonal prehistoric excavations or not. Hence, the main objective of this study is to unveil the prehistoric faunal diversity of Eastern Sri Lanka as revealed by the Rajagala Archaeological Excavation, which was conducted in May 2018. This excavation made notable discoveries including stone tools, glass beads, animal teeth and bones, shells, human bones, some floral remains, etc. and according to the relative dating, the aforesaid findings have been designated as belonging to the Mesolithic Period of Sri Lanka. Thus, the Mesolithic faunal residues found at the excavation and the related literary sources have been used as primary and secondary data sources for this research. Out of the findings, the researchers have identified 35 species, belonging to the Kingdom Animalia and 7 different Classes. The majority of species (48%) belong to Class Mammalia, which includes the orders of Primates, Canivora, Artiodactyla, Rodentia and Chiroptera. The rest consist of the classes of Mollusca, Reptilia, Aves, etc. The bones of the marine species reveal the contemporary dry zonal human interaction with the coastal region. Similar to the other Mesolithic sites in Sri Lanka, Rajagala has also been inhabited by common dry zonal animal species, except the wet zonal 'Acavus' Molluscan species. Furthermore, it is assumed that plenty of diversified animal existence in the area might have created an environment not to have a scarcity of food to the contemporary humans. Through these findings the researchers have made an attempt to build a comprehensive understanding of the faunal diversity of prehistoric eastern part of the country while opening many avenues for further research.

Keywords: *Eastern Sri Lanka, Faunal diversity, Mesolithic period, Rajagala*

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