

Borneo's Orang-utans

Naturetrek Tour Report

7 - 17 September 2017



Orang-utan male



Sun Bear



Whiskered Treeswift



Saltwater Crocodile

Report compiled by Tim Low
Images courtesy of Anne Holford



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Day 1

Thursday 7th September

Outbound to Kuala Lumpur and onwards to Sandakan

For most, the tour started with a flight from the UK, however in Tim's case it was Australia.

Day 2

Friday 8th September

Arrival at Sandakan; drive to Sepilok

The weather in Borneo was hot, humid and largely overcast. Wildlife viewing began even before we left Sandakan airport when Chestnut Munias were seen carrying straw to a nest inside a small tree just outside the building. A Brown-throated Sunbird landed in this tree while a Brahminy Kite flew past. Hazwan introduced himself and we were driven by Abdul the short distance to Sepilok Nature Resort, during which Hazwan talked about the adventures that awaited us.

We settled into our rooms to relax after the long flight, though not before a large Water Monitor was seen swimming in the ornamental lake. Tim saw Evelyn and Alan wandering about with binoculars and joined them for a walk around the resort grounds during which various birds were seen including Yellow-eared and Thick-billed Spiderhunters pecking at a Durian fruit, a Black-and-yellow Broadbill that perched very close for several minutes, and a frisky Pied Fantail. A Giant Squirrel and Bornean Pygmy Squirrel were seen in a tree and a Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot flew past.

At 5.30pm Tim gave an introductory talk that was aborted when it was noticed that an Orang-utan was climbing into a tree beside the lake to feed on palm fruit. It was a large female and the first of many fine Orang-utans we saw. Two Oriental Pied Hornbills then flew past.

With a local guide and Hazwan we went on a pre-dinner night walk along the boardwalks of the Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre. This provided the first indications that we were in for a spectacular tour. On a branch at about eye level, not far from the boardwalk, we were shown a stout green snake sprawled on a branch – a Bornean Keeled Green Pit Viper. A smaller one was seen in another tree. We saw various frogs, ranging from a Giant River Frog right down to a tiny Treehole Frog broadcasting its musical note from a small hole in a tree. On a stem over a small stream an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher was sleeping.

In a large clearing Red Giant Flying Squirrels were emerging from holes in tall trees all around us, scampering up trunks ready to glide away. It was difficult to know how many there were as we would see movement in one tree, and then in another, in three different clumps of trees. There seemed to be at least six, and various glides drew gasps of admiration. A rehabilitated Orang-utan was in this clearing, on the lawn, distracting our attention from the squirrels.

We had walked out of the reserve when Julie spotted something remarkable on the edge of the car park – a Slow Loris making its way along a branch. It proved the highlight of the day, delivered after we thought the spotlight was over. Mirian and Tim were behind the rest of the group when a guide came running to announce it. By the

time they reached the vicinity that loris had disappeared into thick foliage, but a second Slow Loris had been located on a high horizontal branch, along which it cautiously proceeded, providing an excellent view.

During dinner a large snake was noticed in the resort restaurant. On a fig tree left in place when the restaurant was built, a Yellow-ringed Cat Snake was sprawled on the trunk shedding its skin. From as close as a metre it was possible to watch the snake pushing against the trunk to peel back its skin, exposing the shiny new surface, which was jet black with bright yellow rings.

Day 3

Saturday 9th September

Sepilok

Today the weather was again hot and humid, with heavy rain at night. Taking into account the long flight from England the previous day, this was a leisurely day at the famous Sepilok Orang-utan Rehabilitation Centre (SORC). When we arrived for the 9am opening an Oriental Dollarbird was perched on a high branch near the office. We made our way through the gate, first disinfecting our hands to reduce the likelihood of passing on a virus or pathogen to any Orang-utan. We passed by the tree where we had seen the large pit viper the night before and it was still there. At a viewing platform separated by glass we watched five Orang-utans feeding on the fruit provided. An Orange-bellied Flowerpecker was pecking at some of the fruit, though not when an Orang-utan was anywhere nearby.

We then moved to a second feeding area set inside the forest for those Orang-utans that are wild living but still rely on some handouts of fruit. An Orang-utan was watched. Within a few minutes Hazwan noticed two Bat Hawks perched high in a tree and he and Tim set up telescopes so that everyone could enjoy these reclusive hawks. A Bornean Pygmy Squirrel was darting up and down a tree very close by. Interest in the Orang-utans surged when a mother and baby arrived. After some time four Prevost's Squirrels arrived within a few minutes of each other to avail themselves of the fruit, then a larger thief appeared, a Pig-tailed Macaque. It ate some fruit then left with a bunch of bananas.

The morning ended with a film about the work undertaken at Sepilok in saving Orang-utans and returning them to the wild. As we left an Orang-utan was resting on the SORC sign.

After lunch at a nearby restaurant, most of us returned to SORC to see the new Sun Bear enclosure, set up to aid bears that have been orphaned or rescued from captivity. At first they were difficult to see among thick vegetation, but then sustained views became possible of them feeding below the raised walkway. Many of the trees in their enclosures were damaged from bears climbing them; others had electric wires to keep bears off. Rhinoceros Hornbills were heard. Tim pointed out two Horned Flying Lizards perching and displaying on nearby tree trunks. These lizards are world famous for their gliding abilities, made possible by membranes stretching between extendible ribs. One elevated walkway at the bear enclosure could not be used because two young Orang-utans had climbed down from trees and were playing on the floor, providing much entertainment. A small mixed flock of birds was seen here, with Greater Green Leafbird, Ashy Tailorbird, Common Iora and a Large Woodshrike. Gill had a powerful experience when one Orang-utan leaned out and touched her on the arm.

Anne, Sue and Steve returned to the Orang-utan feeding area. As well as six Orang-utans, they enjoyed the spectacle of about 30 Pig-tailed Macaques arriving, including a mother and baby.

At 4.30pm some of us opted for a visit to the canopy walkway at the Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Centre. Birding highlights were a Wallace's Hawk-Eagle flying to its nest in a towering Menggaris tree, and a flock of Bushy-crested Hornbills flying past. Other birds seen included an Oriental Pied Hornbill before the walkway was reached and, in a clump of bamboo, a Chestnut-breasted Malkoha and Buff-vented and Cream-vented Bulbuls. Perched on a high branch close to the walkway was a Green Forest Lizard, bright lime-green in colour. The loud calls of Giant River Frogs provided atmosphere. At dusk a Red Giant Flying Squirrel could be seen peering out of its tree hole. We waited until it launched a dramatic glide over the pathway on which we were waiting. Another was seen in a nearby tree, though not in 'flight'.

Day 4

Sunday 10th September

Sepilok; Kinabatangan River; Sukau

Morning sightings around the resort included a Rhinoceros Hornbill flying over, a Water Monitor swimming in the lake and Pig-tailed Macaques in trees beside the lake. Steve, Anne, Alan and Evelyn opted for a morning bird walk on and around the Sepilok canopy walkway. On the roadside fringing the forest some appealing birds were seen including a White-crowned Shama and a Red-bearded Bee-eater perched on a telegraph wire very close to a Blue-eared Bee-eater. Inside the forest we soon encountered a small mixed flock featuring Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Banded Woodpecker, Raffles Malkoha, Ashy Tailorbird, Red-and-black Broadbill and Black-and-yellow Broadbill. Broadbills are so colourful that it was a delight to see two species close together. Hazwan pointed out the long entry tube of a stingless bee colony a metre up a tree. A Red-eyed Bulbul was seen.

The middle of the day was taken up with the travel from Sepilok to Sukau Rainforest Lodge, which entailed a short drive into Sandakan, where a hearty lunch was enjoyed at a stately hotel, followed by a boat journey up the Kinabatangan River. While we passed groves of Nipa Palms and mangroves, various birds were seen including Brahminy Kite, a young White-bellied Sea Eagle, Purple Heron, Oriental Darter, Whiskered Tern, three species of egret, and something very rare roosting in a tree – a Storm's Stork. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) estimates the global population of this endangered species to be a mere 260-330 mature individuals. A large Saltwater Crocodile was spotted on a bank. The highlight of the journey, however, was an encounter with a troop of Proboscis Monkeys in riverside trees. With their enormous snouts, the large males have to be seen to be believed.

Umbrellas were handed out when we arrived at Sukau Rainforest Lodge because a tropical downpour was underway. The Sukau manager gave us a briefing about the resort that was rendered inaudible by pounding rain on the roof! The rain ended soon enough and we were back on the river in a smaller boat, racing downstream to a bend in the river with tall canegrass backed by rainforest where, for the past couple of days, Bornean Pygmy Elephants had been feeding. There was nothing to see when we arrived apart from a wall of thick grass, but we soon heard a roar worthy of King Kong. Over the next half an hour we could occasionally hear a bellow, snort or trumpeting, plus crunching noises indicating that stems were being crushed by feet or teeth, but the day was turning into night without any elephant showing itself. The boat was brought to ground on the bank where the noises were loudest and we continued waiting. The tops of the canegrass could be seen swaying less than 20 metres away. In the gloom it was possible to imagine that an elephant might be visible but the light was too

meagre. But then some of us could make out the top of an elephant's head. A flapping ear elicited gasps, which were louder when a trunk was seen to rise up from the sward of grass then fall again. There was further movement then the flick of a spotlight switch revealed an elephant standing before us. It pulled back in surprise, paused, and then continued feeding on the lush grass at its feet. Mirian and Brian, seated at the front of the boat, were no more than 10 metres from Borneo's largest (and most dangerous) mammal. We could see every crease in its hide, steam rising from its body, and its thick pink tongue. A second elephant, and a calf, soon came into view. It was an amazing encounter. On the return journey Hazwan spotted a Buffy Fish Owl in a tree.

Day 5

Monday 11th September

Sukau; Kinabatangan; Gomantong Cave; Menaggol Creek

We began with an early morning boat cruise in search of wildlife. Mist draped a steep limestone hill clad in rainforest that reared up ahead of us. Hazwan nudged the boat into a small limestone cliff where more than a hundred Glossy Swiftlets had their nests, crowded together in a recess. Most of the birds stayed put, even though Evelyn and Alan, seated at the front of the boat, were so close they could have stood up and touched some of the nests.

Hazwan was then alerted by phone to a large Orang-utan seen nearby, so we sped up river past stretches of rainforest to the designated tree. It proved to be a tall mango tree standing near a house set in a clearing in the forest. The Orang-utan was a large male, reclining lazily in a fork, but reaching out every so often for a mango, and then another. Hazwan drove the boat on to the bank and a few of us climbed through the tall grass for a closer view. It returned our looks with penetrating eyes. Hazwan said there was nothing about its demeanour to suggest it was upset, so we remained for some time. A woman from the house came over and told us that elephants had visited the day before. We could see their dung. The Kinabatangan is not so much a vast wilderness as a place where wildlife and people coexist. We saw further evidence of this when we were returning towards Sukau for a second breakfast and found a party of Pied Hornbills hopping about in the garden of another riverbank house. They perched on stairs and a fence very close to us and pecked the ground, then landed on the rafters of an adjoining building as sparrows might do.

During our second breakfast we saw a long line of empty drink bottles floating down river. Hazwan said these were the floats of a fishing net travelling along the river that would be collected later with its harvest. A Sunda Flying Lemur (Malaysian Colugo) was noticed roosting on a tree trunk right beside resort buildings. The excitement doubled when, from under the flap between its limbs, a baby Flying Lemur pushed out its head to stare at us.

Hazwan then took us around the Sukau boardwalk to see some of the smaller creatures – an impressive Tree Nymph butterfly, a tree skink, a tractor millipede and flowering orchids. Long-tailed Macaques thumped on the dented roof and crashed into foliage beside us. The highlight came at the shelter at the end when Steve noticed a snake peering at us from a gap in the ceiling. There was another beside it. They were Paradise Tree Snakes, the famous flying (but really gliding) snakes of Asia.

In the afternoon we visited Gomantong Caves, a famous site at which bats roost and swiftlets nest, and harvesting for bird's-nest soup goes on. On the drive in a Yellow-throated Martin scampered across the road, although only some of us saw it. We stopped when Hazwan noticed Red Leaf Monkeys in trees beside the road.

These were very willing to be watched and photographed, including one that was eating small greenish fruits. Hazwan then noticed a Crested Serpent Eagle watching us from a branch above the road, and it was very willing to pose while photographs were taken from close by.

As we approached the cave entrance Hazwan explained that because of the overcast weather many bats were leaving early, and he pointed to swirling 'flocks' of bats resembling starlings. They travel in tight groups to reduce the risks of being targeted by a raptor. The cave proved to be enormous, with many cockroaches on the walls, and swifts constantly leaving and entering. Wrinkle-lipped Bats could be seen at close hand on one wall. It was a noisy, humid and unhygienic place.

After the cave, Hazwan led us up a short hill to watch Bat Hawks hunting. By this time the bats were issuing in a vast continuous stream into which, every few minutes, a Bat Hawk would dive, causing the bat column to change shape as the bats veered to avoid it. With binoculars we could see that most attacks were successful, with a lump held below the hawk indicating a bat caught. The hawks eat on the wing.

On a relaxing after-dinner boat cruise up a small stream, Sungai Menaggol, we saw three Buffy Fish Owls (one on the Kinabatangan itself), a sleeping Stork-billed Kingfisher, two sleeping Blue-eared Kingfishers and two Saltwater Crocodiles, one of which was very small.

Day 6

Tuesday 12th September

Sukau to Danum Valley

Today was humid and largely overcast. During breakfast Proboscis Monkeys were seen across the river, and Long-tailed Macaques visited the restaurant area, as they had the morning before, one making off with a slice of toast. Young Pacific Swallows perched on poles beside the boats. The morning was taken up with the drive to Danum Valley. It provided an opportunity to birdwatch from the bus. Some quality birds were seen at first, notably Pied Hornbills and a pair of Crested Serpent Eagles then, as we passed through oil palm plantations, a range of farmland birds were seen including vast numbers of Barn Swallows, a few Collared Kingfishers, White-breasted Woodswallows, Asian Glossy Starlings, Javan Mynas, a Purple Heron, White-breasted Waterhen, Black-shouldered Kite, Long-tailed Shrike and a communal roost of Little Egrets.

There was light rain when we arrived at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge in Danum Valley, which didn't stop us obtaining excellent photographs from the veranda of a nearby Wallace's Hawk-Eagle. Bearded Pigs were seen wandering near some of the chalets. After settling into our rooms we were soon given an introductory talk and slide show by AK. We met Daryl, the skilled local guide appointed to our group. There was heavy rain in the afternoon, which hardly mattered because it was possible to stand on the restaurant verandah and watch a male Orang-utan leave a nest beside the lodge to build a second nest, and use a branch as an umbrella.

A small group went on a night walk around the boardwalk, which some missed due to a misunderstanding about the timing. A Malay Civet was glimpsed before it scampered into thick undergrowth, then a group of Hairy-backed Bulbuls was found sleeping on a low stem. Also asleep on a stem was a Bornean Angle-headed Dragon. A few frogs were seen. At the end of the walk, very close to the resort, eye-shine indicated a Binturong climbing down a tree. The Binturong is the world's largest civet although this one was just a youngster. It was difficult to see until it crossed the road not far away.

Day 7

Wednesday 13th September

Danum Valley

During breakfast a Bearded Pig wandered around the gardens. A Whiskered Treeswift was sallying out to snatch flying insects and returning to perch on any of three dead stems close to the restaurant; its beautiful colours and elegant shape were appreciated by all. Treeswifts represent a small family of four species in tropical Asia and New Guinea that provide a link between the true swifts, of which there are a hundred species, and other birds, among which hummingbirds are their closest relatives.

Daryl and Hazwan led a morning walk to the canopy walkway that produced a range of new birds for the trip – Wreathed Hornbills flying over, a Black Hornbill seen briefly, a Black-Bellied Malkoha, Green Imperial Pigeon, Brown Barbet and Grey-Cheeked Bulbul – all of which were seen along the access road rather than on the canopy walk itself. Red Leaf Monkeys were also seen along with a Prevost's Squirrel and two Hairy-Backed Bulbuls. Susan, Jane and Mirian stayed at the far end of the boardwalk hearing Daryl talk about his grandfather's headhunting days, where they saw a Rhinoceros Hornbill, Black Hornbill (briefly), Asian Fairy Bluebird and others.

An afternoon walk began in an excellent way when an Oriental Vine Snake was detected in shrubbery right by the resort building. It was unfazed by a gaggle of admirers taking photographs. The intense lime green colour, strangely-shaped head and ease of motion through foliage left a strong impression on all who saw it.

A short way down the road Daryl pointed out a Flying Lemur clinging to a tree beside the road. This one had orange fur unlike the olive-green ones at Sukau. Daryl said their colours vary to suit disguise on different bark types. He located a small bat roosting inside the young furled leaf of a small banana tree. This bat may have well have been a Whiskered Myotis, although other species also roost in furled leaves.

A little further along an Orang-utan female was in a tree, with two researchers nearby monitoring its movements. We crossed the river and visited a stream for a foot massage by fish, which evoked much nervous laughter because it was nearly impossible to endure their rasping jaws, even though the fish were small.

A 6.30pm night drive in the truck yielded Lesser Mouse Deer, Black Flying Squirrel and Thomas's Flying Squirrel. Daryl became very excited when he spotted a rarely seen mammal, one that is placed in its own family – the Pen-Tailed Tree-Shrew. This small nocturnal mammal with a bushy tail tip has been called a living fossil due to 34 million year old fossils found in China that are 'strikingly similar' to the living species. But the glimpse we had of it fleeing down the side of a small tree was so fleeting it might as well have been a rat. The best sighting for some was of two Rhinoceros Hornbills spotted by Daryl sleeping high in a tree. A snake on the road could not be seen well enough for identification.

Day 8

Thursday 14th September

Danum

It was another hot, humid and largely overcast day, and this was a day on which many good birds were seen, along with more spectacular mammals. In the morning one group hiked up nearby Coffin Hill, which offers a commanding view of the resort grounds and a small rainforest valley. More than an hour was spent here

watching for birds and listening to calling gibbons. A visit was also made to Coffin Cliff to see decaying coffins and human bones. The best wildlife moment came when Tim saw a Helmeted Hornbill fly into a tree below, and we could look down upon it. Not often is this endangered bird, the largest of Asia's hornbills, admired from above. A pair of flying lizards performed close at hand, and Fiery Minivets were seen fluttering about like butterflies. Other birds seen during the outing included a Rufous-tailed Tailorbird, Purple-naped Sunbird and Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike. Processionary termites were noticed in a long trail.

Julie, Gill, Jane, Mirian and Brian had opted against this walk and were rewarded with distant telescope views of two Bornean Gibbons, swinging in trees for several minutes, obtained from the resort grounds. Brian, Mirian and Gill visited the river and enjoyed excellent views of a perched Lesser Fish Eagle. Hazwan led two morning walks, during which the sightings included an Orang-utan, Maroon Philentoma, Rufous-tailed Tailorbird and Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher.

An afternoon walk along the access road proved a great success. A troop of Red Leaf Monkeys offered entertainment and a succession of hornbills were seen. Two Wreathed Hornbills flew past, and then a male Wrinkled Hornbill offered excellent views through Hazwan's telescope. Two Rhinoceros Hornbills perched above the road and one of these was seen very well. A Blue-naped Monarch was noted by the road, along with a Chestnut-winged Babbler and Hairy-backed Bulbul.

Most of the group then turned back with Hazwan, while Tim took Steve, Anne, Alan and Evelyn up the canopy walk. A Green Imperial Pigeon was soon seen, and Evelyn spotted and identified a Black-and-yellow Broadbill. Black Hornbills were glimpsed in the distance, and then a Crested (previously called Oriental) Honey Buzzard flew up and landed in a tree for several minutes, just before a party of Blue-throated Bee-eaters flew over. On the way back a forktail was flushed from a streambed but was seen too fleetingly for identification.

A night walk began with an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher asleep on a low branch beside the road. A little further on a Greater Mouse Deer was seen to slink away into the undergrowth. Around the frog ponds three Harlequin Tree Frogs were perched on leaves. These are famous as gliding frogs, though it is not obvious from seeing them at rest that they can do this. A Red-sided Keelback, a harmless snake, was noticed on a large leaf ready, no doubt, to pounce on any frog that landed nearby.

On the boardwalk Tim and Hazwan spotted a large blue and reddish ball of fluff sitting on a low stem – a sleeping Blue-headed Pitta. This provided much interest, since it looked less like a bird than a big pom. Tim saw another mouse deer near the river, and another sleeping bird was found on a low stem – a Rufous-winged Philentoma. It, too, was a ball of fluff, though with a tail poking out. A Cinnamon Tree Frog perched on a leaf attracted admiration, and a large Bent-toed Gecko (thought at first to be a barking gecko) was found on a nearby tree and photographed.

Hazwan spotted a third sleeping bird, but no one else got to see this because Daryl, at the head of the walk, did something astounding. He suddenly leapt off the boardwalk and ran to a sapling where he had something outstanding in his spotlight – a Tarsier! It was perched on the side of a small tree, wondering how to respond to Daryl's light. Most of us climbed down from the walkway to reach the spot where it was perched and offering a sustained view. This tiny primate with its giant eyes and splayed fingers proved to be the animal of the trip for some of us, and no wonder. It is a tiny primate that is rarely seen. Daryl later explained that he had smelled it,

and then caught a glimpse of its eyeshine. Everyone came back very pleased at having seen such a wide range of animals on such a short and leisurely walk. Anne had opted against undertaking this walk, but Hazwan found her and led her back to the Tarsier with Daryl, who found it again in a different tree.

Day 9

Friday 15th September

Danum Valley

On this last full day a substantial morning walk began at 7am. Hazwan led us across a suspension bridge over the river from which a perching Blue-banded Kingfisher was seen well. Following the Segama Trail, a pair of Orange-backed Woodpeckers was soon found. The female rested on the side of a giant tree, allowing extended views. Further along the trail Hazwan pointed out a display court of an Argus Pheasant, and one was heard calling in the distance. Tim felt the call of nature, fell back behind the group, and while looking up into the canopy noticed a black bird with a red head - a Bristlehead; the island's most famous endemic bird and one that is so different from all other birds it is placed in a family of its own. He ran to alert the group and Evelyn rushed back and had a brief but satisfying view. The rest of the group preferred to wait up the track, where calls indicated that Bristlebirds were approaching. The view that was provided was too brief and it was a Fiery Minivet that showed itself to advantage instead.

The track ended at the access road where Daryl heard a Red-bearded Bee-eater, and Evelyn, Alan and Tim remained with him to see if it could be located. After Daryl imitated the call it landed nearby, on a stem below the level of the road, and for ten minutes sat there offering exceptional views of its pink forehead, red face and breast, yellow undertail and green body. It was a very pretty bird.

Out on the road another striking find was made. A male Scarlet-rumped Trogon was perched at eye level on a nearby branch. This exceptionally colourful bird seemed unfazed by the whole group walking back and forth taking photographs from a distance of less than 30 metres, staying there for ten minutes before its patience finally gave out and it left. A male of the same species had been seen earlier on the walk but perched much higher up.

After lunch an Oriental Darter was seen flying past the lodge, and then an enormous moth was noticed fluttering above the lawn. It was an Atlas Moth, a member of the largest species of moth in the world that must have been disturbed from its daytime roost. It perched for long enough to show its pattern to advantage, then fluttered around the side of the building. Tim ran to the front of the building and followed its flight until it came to rest, dangling beneath a ginger leaf, where it allowed Evelyn to approach close enough for photographs.

Rain thundered down during the afternoon and the river rose dramatically. Mirian, Brian and Jane showed great spirit by setting out on the 4pm walk, even though it was still raining lightly. A Bearded Pig wandered by before the group had set out, then a Prevost's Squirrel ran down a tree and a Long-tailed Macaque was sighted nearby. Nothing was seen on the first 15 minutes of the actual walk, so they returned. Visiting the river bank, Alan and Evelyn saw a Lesser Fish Eagle.

The 8.30pm night drive was very different from the earlier drive, providing several very close sightings of Sambar deer, including a group with a stag and a foal only a few months old. Two Flying Lemurs were seen on tree trunks, one of which scampered to a great height before it was lost from view. In a very high tree a Red

Giant Flying Squirrel was feeding on unripe fruit, and a Black Flying Squirrel was seen in another tree. The most memorable sighting for most was probably the Black-and-crimson Pitta asleep on a low stem very close to the road. Like the earlier pitta it was a feathered ball, but crimson instead of blue and reddish-brown, with some black on top.

Day 10

Saturday 16th September

Drive to Lahad Datu airport and outbound flight

Before breakfast, Long-tailed Macaques were foraging around the buildings, feeding on berries and the big yellow flowers of Dillenia trees, indifferent to anyone taking their photographs from a few metres away. One baby had difficulty walking along the handrail.

After a leisurely breakfast Hazwan led a morning walk. While gibbons called a Red-billed Malkoha flew into a tree before us, and a Plantain Squirrel perched nearby on a trunk, only to be chased off by a larger Prevost's Squirrel. Further along the road Hazwan set his telescope on a Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot, though only some saw it properly. Most of us turned back after an hour, to be rewarded with a male Diard's Trogon, which remained in place for long enough to give everyone good views through the telescope. Red Leaf Monkey and Long-tailed Macaque were also seen.

Evelyn and Alan continued along the road with Daryl and Tim. Daryl whistled in a Black-and-crimson Pitta until it was only a few metres away, but it was shyer than some and only Daryl saw it. He provided telescope views of a distant Asian Fairy Bluebird. Other birds seen included Black-headed, Hairy-backed and Red-eyed Bulbuls. Tim saw a Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker with these.

After an early lunch it was time to leave. A surprise on the drive down was a female Bornean Crested Fireback pheasant at the side of the road, which took flight when the vehicles slowed down for a look. A Greater Coucal and Water Monitor were also seen.

At Lahad Datu airport, through the windows, Zebra Doves and Spotted Doves were seen.

Day 11

Sunday 17th September

Outbound to Kuala Lumpur and on to London

After flights to Kuala Lumpur, our overnight flight landed back in London where another Naturetrek adventure came to an end.

Summary and highlights

Everyone was very pleased to know they were seeing more mammals than usual on a visit to Borneo of this duration. No one saw every mammal that was sighted, but everyone saw more than enough to feel fortunate. Of the unusual mammals the Western Tarsier was the highlight, with the Bornean Slow Loris coming second. Everyone was delighted by their sustained views of Orang-utans, including one building a nest, and the close encounters with elephants and Proboscis Monkeys. Only Tim was impressed by the rarely seen Pen-tailed Treeshrew.

The Buffy Fish Owl, Blue-headed Pitta and Scarlet-naped Trogon were birding highlights, and several colourful snakes were memorable, notably the Oriental Vine Snake, the larger pit viper, the Yellow-ringed Cat Snake in the Sepilok restaurant and the Paradise Tree Snakes.

The group was also impressed by the larger invertebrates that were seen: the giant Atlas Moth (*Attacus atlas*), yellow birdwings (*Troides*), a Rajah Brookes Birdwing (*Trogonoptera brookiana*, the national butterfly of Malaysia), Giant Uranid Moths (*Lyssa menoetius*), Giant Carpenter Bees (*Xylocarpa latipes*), giant tractor millipedes and giant pill millipedes. The fungi were also enjoyed.

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Orang-utan portraits

Species Lists

Sukau includes Gomantong Cave and nearby reaches of Sungai Kinabatangan and its tributaries. Danum Valley refers to the Conservation Area, as does Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Mammals (S = seen; H = heard only; E = endemic)

Nomenclature follows Phillipps (2016), some alternative names are provided

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	
Pen-tailed Treeshrew	<i>Ptilocercus lowii</i>	-	-	S	Seen in small tree on night drive
Wrinkle-lipped Bat	<i>Tadarida plicata</i>	-	S	1	Thousands leaving Gomantong Cave
Whiskered Myotis	<i>Myotis muricola</i>	-	-	S	Bats in furled leaves may be this
Malaysian Colugo	<i>Cyanocephalus variegatus</i>	-	S	S	Mother & baby at Sukau, 3 at Danum
Bornean Slow Loris	<i>Nycticebus menagensis</i>	S	-	-	Two at night in Sepilok carpark
Western Tarsier	<i>Cephalopachus bancanus</i>	-	-	S	One at night near boardwalk
Maroon Langur E	<i>Presbytis rubicunda</i>	-	S	S	Several sustained sightings
Proboscis Monkey E	<i>Nasalis larvatus</i>	-	S	-	Along river including near resort
Long-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>	S	S	S	Around Sukau & Danum buildings
Sunda Pig-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>	S	-	-	Three Sepilok sightings
East Bornean Grey Gibbon E	<i>Hylobates funereus</i>	-	H	S	Seen by scope swinging about
Bornean Orang-utan E	<i>Pongo pygmaeus</i>	S	S	S	Many good sightings
Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa affinis</i>	S	-	S	Two good sightings, up in trees
Prevost's Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus prevostii pluto</i>	S	S	S	Many sightings
Plantain Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus notatus</i>	-	-	S	One on tree near
Plain Pygmy Squirrel E	<i>Exilisciurus exilis</i>	S	-	S	Several seen in trees
Black Flying Squirrel	<i>Aeromys tephromelas</i>	-	-	S	On night drive
Red Giant Flying Squirrel	<i>Petaurista petaurista</i>	S	-	S	Many seen, mainly at Sepilok
Thomas's Flying Squirrel E	<i>Aeromys thomasi</i>	-	-	S	One on each night drive
Yellow-throated Marten	<i>Martes flavigula</i>	-	S	-	Crossed road en route to cave
Malay Civet	<i>Viverra zibetha</i>	-	-	S	Glimpsed near boardwalk
Binturong	<i>Arctictis binturong</i>	-	-	S	A youngster at night near lodge
Asian Elephant	<i>Elephas maximus</i>	-	S	-	Excellent night sighting from boat
Bearded Pig	<i>Sus barbatus</i>	-	S	S	Tame around Danum lodge

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	
Lesser Mouse-Deer	<i>Tragulus kanchil</i>	-	-	S	Danum night drive
Greater Mouse-Deer	<i>Tragulus napu</i>	-	-	S	Two seen on Danum night walk
Sambar	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>	-	-	S	Several close sightings on night drive

Birds (S = seen; H = heard only; E = endemic; I = Introduced)

Nomenclature (follows the IOC. Not all species heard only during the trip are listed below, including species such as ubiquitous barbets and some babbler species. Only notable species and/or species brought to the attention of participants are included. Species seen but not listed for a location were seen in transit

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	Comments
Crested Fireback	<i>Lophura ignita</i>	-	-	S	Flushed on road leaving Danum
Great Argus	<i>Argusianus argus</i>	-	-	H	Heard & display court seen
Storm's Stork	<i>Ciconia stormi</i>	-	S	-	In dead tree beside river
Great-billed Heron	<i>Ardea sumatrana</i>	-	-	S	Seen beside lodge
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	-	S	-	Kinabatangan & Sukau roadside
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	-	S	-	Many on Kinabatangan
Intermediate Egret	<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	-	S	-	Kinabatangan, at least one seen
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	-	S	-	Many, Kinabatangan & leaving Sukau
Oriental Darter	<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	-	S	S	Kinabatangan & Danum lodge
Crested Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	-	-	S	Perched near Canopy walk
Bat Hawk	<i>Macheiramphus alcinus</i>	S	S	-	Two near orang feeding site, & at cave
Black-shouldered (Black-winged) Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	-	S	-	One beside road leaving Sukau
Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	S	S	-	Sandakan airport & Kinabatangan
White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	-	S	-	Kinabatangan in flight
Lesser Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus humilis</i>	-	-	S	Seen beside lodge
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	-	S	-	On road to caves & leaving Sukau
Crested Goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>	-	-	S	One seen
Wallace's Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus nanus</i>	S	-	S	Sepilok canopy walk, & by Danum lodge
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	-	S	-	Seen by Evelyn leaving Sukau
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	-	S	-	Kinabatangan, a couple seen

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	Comments
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) I	<i>Columba livia</i>	-	-	-	In Lahad Datu
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	S	-	-	Sandakan & Lahad Datu airports
Zebra Dove I	<i>Geopelia striata</i>	S	-	-	Sepilok roadside & Lahad Datu airport
Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>	-	-	S	Two seen separately at Danum
Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>	S	-	S	Scope view at Danum
Black-bellied Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus diardi</i>	-	-	S	One Danum sighting
Red-billed Malkoha	<i>Zanclostomus javanicus</i>	-	-	S	High in tree near lodge
Raffles's Malkoha	<i>Rhinortha chlorophaea</i>	S	-	S	Various sightings
Chestnut-breasted Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus curvirostris</i>	S	-	-	Beside Sepilok canopy walkway
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	-	-	S	Seen by road leaving Danum
Buffy Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa ketupu</i>	-	-	S	Kinabatangan & Menaggol Creek
Glossy Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	S	S	S	Seen everywhere, nests near Sukau
Mossy-nest Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus salangana</i>	-	S	-	Presumably seen at cave (& elsewhere)
Black-nest Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus maximus</i>	-	S	-	Presumably seen at cave (& elsewhere)
Edible-nest Swiftlet	<i>Aerodramus fuciphagus</i>	-	S	-	Presumably seen at cave (& elsewhere)
Silver-rumped Spinetail	<i>Rhaphidura leucopygialis</i>	-	-	S	Around Danum restaurant
Brown-backed (Brown) Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>	S	-	-	Around resort
Whiskered Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne comata</i>	-	-	S	Beside lodge restaurant for 2 days
Red-naped Trogon	<i>Harpactes kasumba</i>	H	-	S	Two seen at Danum, one by road
Diard's Trogon	<i>Harpactes diardii</i>	-	-	S	Seen beside Danum access road
Scarlet-rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes duvaucellii</i>	H	-	H	Heard at Sukau & fish massage pool
Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	S	-	-	At orang centre, dusk & next morning
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	-	S	-	One asleep, Menaggol Creek
Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>	-	S	-	On telegraph wires leaving Sukau
Rufous-backed (Oriental Dwarf) Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca</i>	-	-	S	Asleep at Danum & once by day
Blue-banded Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo euryzona</i>	-	-	S	One seen from suspension bridge
Blue-eared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo meninting</i>	-	S	-	Two asleep, Menaggol Creek
Common Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	-	S	-	On branch over Kinabatangan
Red-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctornis amictus</i>	S	-	S	Female at Sepilok, male at Danum

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	Comments
Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>	S	-	S	Flock near Danum canopy walk
Bushy-crested Hornbill	<i>Anorrhinus galeritus</i>	S	-	H	Flew past Sepilok canopy walkway
Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>	S	S	-	Common at Sepilok & Sukau
Black Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros malayanus</i>	H	-	S	Two pairs seen at a distance
Rhinoceros Hornbill	<i>Buceros rhinoceros</i>	S	H	S	Several good Danum sightings
Helmeted Hornbill	<i>Rhinoplax vigil</i>	-	-	S	One seen from Coffin Hill
Wrinkled Hornbill	<i>Aceros corrugatus</i>	-	-	S	Pair on Danum access road
Wreathed Hornbill	<i>Rhyticeros undulatus</i>	-	-	S	Pair flew over Danum access road
Red-throated Barbet	<i>Megalaima mystacophanos</i>	H	-	H	Heard on Segama Trail
Yellow-crowned Barbet	<i>Megalaima henricii</i>	-	-	H	
Blue-eared Barbet	<i>Megalaima australis</i>	H	-	H	Often heard calling
Brown Barbet	<i>Caloramphus fuliginosus</i>	-	-	S	Seen beside access road
Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>	S	-	-	With flock near canopy walk
Maroon Woodpecker	<i>Blythipicus rubiginosus</i>	-	-	S	1 Danum sighting
Orange-backed Woodpecker	<i>Reinwardtipicus validus</i>	-	-	S	Female perched on large tree
Black-and-red Broadbill	<i>Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchus</i>	S	-	H	In Sepilok mixed flock
Black-and-yellow Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus ochromalus</i>	S	H	S	Three seen
Blue-headed Pitta E	<i>Hydromis baudi</i>	-	-	S	Sleeping in sapling beside boardwalk
Black-and-crimson (Black-headed) Pitta E	<i>Erythropitta ussheri</i>	-	-	S	Seen from truck, sleeping beside access road
Fiery Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus igneus</i>	-	-	S	Two Danum sightings, 1 from Coffin Hill
Large Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus</i>	S	-	-	Sepilok bear sanctuary
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>	-	-	S	Coffin Hill at lookout
Rufous-winged Philentoma	<i>Philentoma pyrhoptera</i>	-	-	S	Sleeping in sapling beside boardwalk
Maroon-breasted Philentoma	<i>Philentoma velata</i>	-	-	S	One sighting
White-breasted Woodswallow	<i>Artamus leucorynchus</i>	-	S	-	Seen on wires when leaving Sukau
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	S	-	-	Sepilok bear sanctuary
Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	-	-	H	On Coffin Hill trail
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	S	-	-	Two in mixed flock
Malaysian Pied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>	S	S	-	Sepilok resort garden, Gomantong Cave

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	Comments
Spotted Fantail	<i>Rhipidura perlata</i>	-	S	S	On Gomantong cave trail & at Danum
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	-	-	S	One beside access road
Slender-billed Crow	<i>Corvus enca</i>	-	S	H	Heard & glimpsed along the rivers
Bornean Bristlehead E	<i>Pityriasis gymnocephala</i>	-	-	S	A group high in trees
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	S	S	-	On Sepilok roadside & leaving Sukau
Brown-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>	S	S	-	Beside Sandakan airport, etc
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird (Rubycheek)	<i>Chalcoparia singalensis</i>	-	-	S	Seen twice including Coffin Hill in shrubs
Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>	S	-	-	By Sepilok road
Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	S	-	-	Photographed by Evelyn
Purple-naped Sunbird	<i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>	-	-	S	Coffin Hill trail
Streaky-breasted Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera everetti</i>	-	-	S	One sighting
Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	S	-	S	In Sepilok resort garden on flowers
Thick-billed Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera crassirostris</i>	S	-	-	On Durian fruit
Long-billed Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera robusta</i>	S	-	-	Resort gardens on last morning
Spectacled Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera flavigaster</i>	-	-	S	Photographed from lodge restaurant
Yellow-eared Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera chrysogenys</i>	S	-	-	On Durian fruit
Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker E	<i>Prionochilus xanthopygius</i>	-	-	S	One beside access road
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>	S	-	S	Many sightings eg. eating orang food
Greater Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>	S	-	S	Several sightings
Lesser Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cyanopogon</i>		-	S	Near Danum lodge & elsewhere
Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	-	-	S	Two sightings along access road
Dusky Munia E	<i>Lonchura fuscans</i>	S	S	S	On Sepilok & Sukau roadsides
Chestnut Munia	<i>Lonchura atricapilla</i>	S	-	S	Nesting beside Sepilok Airport
Scaly-breasted Munia I	<i>Lonchura punctulatus</i>	S	-	-	Feeding beside Sepilok Airport
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	S	S	-	Common in villages & towns
Javan Myna I	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>	-	S	S	Sukau roadsides, Lahad Datu airport
Asian Glossy Starling	<i>Aplonis panayensis</i>	S	S	-	Calling loudly in Sepilok resort fig trees
Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	-	-	S	In Danum lodge grounds
White-crowned Shama E	<i>Copsychus stricklandii</i>	S	-	S	In Danum lodge grounds

Common name	Scientific name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	Comments
Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>	-	-	S	One seen by Evelyn
Straw-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>	-	-	H	Musical calls heard near river
Puff-backed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus eutilotus</i>	-	-	S	Several sightings, including asleep
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	S	S	S	Danum resort & other open sites
Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>	S	-	-	Rehabilitation Centre
Cream-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>	S	-	S	Seen one morning at Danum
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>	S	-	S	Near Sepilok walkway
Buff-vented Bulbul	<i>Iole olivacea</i>	S	-	-	In bamboo beside canopy walk
Yellow-bellied Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus phaeocephalus</i>	-	-	S	Once at Danum
Grey-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus bres</i>	-	-	S	Seen on access road, last morning
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	-	S	-	Vast numbers along river & after Sukau
House (Pacific) Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	S	S	S	In evidence everywhere
Chestnut-winged Babbler	<i>Stachyris erythroptera</i>	S	-	S	Near Sepilok Orang office & Danum
Ferruginous Babbler	<i>Trichastoma bicolor</i>	-	-	H	Strident calls heard twice
Ashy (Red-headed) Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>	S	S	S	A few sightings in trees
Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>	-	-	S	Coffin Hill in undergrowth

Reptiles (S = seen; H = heard only; E = endemic)

Names in brackets indicate some alternative common names.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	
Saltwater Crocodile	<i>Crocodylus porosus</i>	-	S	-	A few seen by day and night
Crested Green Lizard	<i>Bronchocela cristatella</i>	S	-	-	Beside Sepilok canopy walkway
Horned Flying Lizard E	<i>Draco cornutus</i>	S	-	S	Bear enclosure & Coffin hill
Bornean Angle-headed Dragon E	<i>Gonocephalus bornensis</i>	-	-	S	Sleeping beside boardwalk
Frilly House Gecko	<i>Cosymbotus platyurus</i>	S	S	S	The main gecko in buildings
Bent-toed Gecko	<i>Cyrtodactylus sp.</i>	-	-	S	On tree beside boardwalk
Warty House Gecko	<i>Gekko monarchus</i>	-	S	-	On Sukau restaurant wall
Barking (Green-eyed) Gecko	<i>Gekko smithii</i>	H	-	S	Loud calls evident

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	
Asian House Gecko	<i>Hemidactylus frenatus</i>	S	S	S	On buildings
Gliding Gecko	<i>Ptychozoon horsfieldii</i>	-	-	S	Seen by day on lodge ceiling
Striped Bornean Tree Skink E	<i>Apterygodon vittatus</i>	S	-	S	On trees
Red-throated Skink	<i>Mabuya rugifera</i>	-	S	-	By Sukau boardwalk
Black-banded Skink	<i>Mabuya rudis</i>	-	S	-	Around Sukau lodge
Tree skink	<i>Sphenomorphus sp</i>	-	S	S	Noted by Hazwan on Sukau boardwalk
Water Monitor	<i>Varanus salvator</i>	S	-	S	Several seen in and near water
Oriental Vine Snake	<i>Ahaetulla prasina</i>	-	-	S	In shrubbery beside lodge
Yellow-ringed Cat (Mangrove) Snake	<i>Boiga dendrophila</i>	S	-	-	Shedding skin in restaurant tree
Paradise Tree Snake	<i>Chrysopelea paradisi</i>	-	S	S	Several seen
Red-sided Keelback	<i>Xenochrophis trianguligerus</i>	-	-	S	At night beside pond near lodge
Bornean Keeled Green Pit Viper	<i>Tropidolaemus subannulatus</i>	S	-	-	Two in trees

Amphibians (S = seen; H = heard only; E = endemic)

Names taken from *A field guide to the frogs of Borneo* (Inger & Stuebing 2005)

Common Name	Scientific Name	Sepilok	Sukau	Danum	
Tree Hole Frog E	<i>Metaphrynella sundana</i>	S	H	-	Calling from low hole in tree
Giant River Frog	<i>Limnonectes leporinus</i>	S	-	-	In creekbed during spotlight
White-lipped Frog	<i>Rana chalconota</i>	S	-	-	In tree at night near viper
Green Paddy Frog	<i>Rana erythraea</i>	H	-	-	Calling loudly at Sepilok resort
Cinnamon Frog	<i>Nyctixalus pictus</i>	-	-	S	On leaf beside boardwalk
Dark-eared Tree Frog	<i>Polypedates macrotis</i>	-	-	S	Beside boardwalk at night
File-eared Frog	<i>Polypedates otlophus</i>	S	-	S	Seen during boardwalk spotlights
Harlequin Tree Frog	<i>Rhacophorus pardalis</i>	-	-	S	Several around pond at night