
Birding Sabah (Malaysian Borneo), March 2009



Sander Pieterse & Ben Wielstra

Introduction

In 2005 we spent four months in Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo. While doing research for our MSc study biology, we had the opportunity to get acquainted with the amazing avifauna inhabiting the island. Our 2005 trip got us hooked and we wanted to revisit Borneo ever since. Lack of time and money prevented us from realizing this. These problems seem to be ever-present, but what the heck. In March 2009 we visited one of the two Malaysian states in the northern part of the island, Sabah.

Borneo, the largest of the Greater Sunda Islands, is still covered with large tracts of lowland rainforest. Although this area is in rapid decline (conversion to oil palm plantations currently being a major threat), it still sustains an incredibly rich ecosystem. Borneo is also renowned for its extensive mountain ranges, covered in misty cloud forests. Especially these higher regions harbor a lot of the island's endemics. These areas are complemented by habitat types ranging from meandering riverine mangrove forests to idyllic tropical islands, each offering a different set of species.



Biodiversity on Borneo goes through the roof. Over 15,000 species of flowering plants cover the island, including almost 300 dipterocarp tree species which dominate the rainforest. Non-botanists (like us) will still enjoy the wealth of orchids, the plentiful pitcher plants, and the huge Rafflesia flowers. The island's more than 200 species of mammal include the hyper rare Sumatran Rhinoceros, the still quite sizable Pygmy Elephant, and the shy Bornean Clouded Leopard (recently elevated to species level). Maybe the most intriguing of them all is the Bornean Orangutan: a recent, controversial proposal is that this ape, and not the chimp, is our closest relative! Reticulated Pythons are big enough to feed on Sun Bears. The dawn choruses of the gibbons are seamlessly taken over by cicadas during the day and tree frogs at night, so drenching the forests in a waterfall of sound day round. Interesting invertebrates are everywhere, from the strange Kinabalu giant earthworm to the beautiful Raja Brooke's Birdwing. The seas are littered with colorful fishes. The bottom-line is: it is very hard to get bored on Borneo!



Birdwise, Borneo holds many species which score well above average on the coolness scale. Think pheasants, hornbills, pittas, and many, many more. According to the taxonomy we use in this report, the island is home to over 200 species endemic to the Sundaland biogeographical region. Babbler and bulbul bonanza! Of these 200+ Sunda endemics, 50 have their ranges entirely confined to Borneo. These Borneo endemics include such treasures as the enigmatic Bornean Ground Cuckoo, forest jewels in the form of pittas (three) and broadbills (two), and the fantastic Fruithunter. The weird Bornean Bristlehead even comprises a completely endemic family!

Our destination Sabah offers a variety of different habitat types, holding a wide selection of bird species, all in relatively close proximity. Furthermore, Malaysians realize that ecotourism is big business. In practice, this means the remaining fragments of forest are offered protection and are accessible to tourists. All this makes Sabah a very attractive and popular birding destination.

Contact

For questions and remarks, feel free to contact us at s_pieterse@hotmail.com and wielstra@hotmail.com

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Media credits

All pictures, sound recordings and movies in this report have been made by Sander Pieterse and Ben Wielstra, with the exception of a single photo by Jason Bugay Reyes (credited as such).

Itinerary

Abbreviations – BRL = Borneo Rainforest Lodge; DVFC = Danum Valley Field Centre; KK = Kota Kinabalu; KNP = Kinabalu National Park; SK = Sungai Kinabatangan; PHS = Poring Hot Springs; RIC = Rafflesia Information Centre

February 28	Flight from Amsterdam to KK (via Singapore)
March 1	Arrival midday KK, taxi to hotel
March 2	Taxi to airport, morning flight KK to Sandakan, by car to Sepilok
March 3	Sepilok to SK midday by car
March 4-6	SK, afternoon excursion Gomantong Caves by car on 5 th
March 7	SK to Lahad Datu midday by car. Lahad Datu to DVFC midday by car
March 8-12	DVFC
March 13	DVFC to BRL late morning by car
March 14	BRL
March 15	BRL to Lahad Datu midday by car, late afternoon flight to KK, taxi to hotel
March 16	Daytrip to Kota Belud, Tuaran and surroundings KK by car
March 17	KK to RIC midday by taxi
March 18	RIC
March 19	RIC to KNP midday by taxi
March 20-23	KNP
March 24	KNP to PHS midday by taxi
March 25-26	PHS
March 27	PHS to KK by taxi
March 28	KK to Pulau Mantanani morning by car and boat
March 29	Pulau Mantanani
March 30	Pulau Mantanani to KK midday by jetty and car
March 31	Taxi to airport, flight in afternoon from KK to Amsterdam (via Singapore)
April 1	Arrival Amsterdam

Notes on birding sites

The lowlands

Sepilok (Rainforest Discovery Centre)

Sepilok, only 25 kilometers away from the town of Sandakan, holds a small fragment of lowland forest. The place is most famous for its Orangutan rehabilitation centre. We however avoided this tourist attraction as we would rather see wild orangutans than traumatized individuals in a petting zoo. The reason of our visit was the patch of lowland rainforest at the relatively new Rainforest Discovery Centre, which has recently proved to be a very reliable site for the Bornean Bristlehead.

A well maintained pathway system runs through the forest at the Rainforest Discovery Centre, which gives you the feeling you are walking around in a park rather than a tropical rainforest. The forest here is not the best around in Sabah, but it is not bad either and offers a nice introduction to lowland forest birding. Furthermore, there is a large and sturdy steel canopy walkway, with two large observation towers (named after the Bristlehead and Red-naped Trogon) [movie: [canopy walkway](#)]. It is quite an impressive structure and should have high birding potential (though we did poorly here). The garden of the nearby Sepilok Forest Edge Resort where we stayed also proved a good spot for some of the commoner open area species.



Canopy walkway at Rainforest Discovery Centre, Sepilok.

A visit to Sepilok can be skipped if you feel confident you will find the Bristlehead elsewhere. We encountered them at Sungai Kinabatangan (but heard only) and at Danum Valley Field Centre (seen twice) as well. We did, however, obtain our best views at Sepilok.

Sungai Kinabatangan

Sungai Kinabatangan is the second longest river of Malaysia. The lower part of the river, part of the Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, comprises riverine forest and freshwater swamp forest. The area around Sukau is a popular tourist attraction, loaded with riverside lodges, where people come to spot wildlife (most notably Pygmy Elephants, Orangutans, and Proboscis Monkeys).

For birdwatchers, Sungai Kinabatangan is well-known as the best place to observe the Bornean Ground Cuckoo. While a star attraction, the Ground Cuckoo is not the only prize here. The river is especially good for observing hornbills and raptors, as these perch riverside or cross the broad river overhead. Moreover, it is a great place to acclimatize to the heat and humidity. As most birding is done from within a boat, there is always a cooling breeze in your face [movie: [cruising a sidearm near the Oxbow lake](#)]. Sweaty hikes are not necessary, unless you really feel like it.



Robert Chong (left) and his boat driver Romsil preparing for a morning boat ride at KJC.

While there is plenty of accommodation along the river, Robert Chong of Kinabatangan Jungle Camp is the man to stay with. He is enthusiastic, knows the river and its birds, does an excellent job on mimicking the vocals of many species, and he discovered how to connect with the Ground Cuckoo. In between cruises, you can also stroll along the trail around Kinabatangan Jungle Camp (although not during or just after the rainy season). Giant Pitta has been observed simply around the camp site! The large open dining area is a nice place to spot the resident Storm's Stork ('Chiko') and Malay Civet ('Tom'). A night cruise should definitely be included here to get to grips with some nocturnal species, especially Buffy Fish-owl and the huge variety of mammals that the river offers.

Gomantong Caves

These amazing limestone caves have been beautifully captured in the BBC documentary Planet Earth (episode 'Caves'), narrated by Sir David Attenborough. Gomantong is the place to see (and actually identify!) swiftlets at their nests. The nests of some of the species here are actually harvested as they are the prime ingredient for bird's nest soup (a delicacy according to some, meaning that harvesting is big business).

The swiftlets share their lair with a huge population of bats. The guano mount produced over the centuries by birds and bats attracts a huge number of cockroaches. There are also big, nasty long-legged centipedes around (do not pet these, they are poisonous!). Be careful with the cave's boardwalk, as it is quite slippery. The usual joke is that you will quite literally be in deep shit if you happen to slip.

Another spectacle to be observed at Gomantong Caves is hunting Bat Hawks in action when the gazillions of bats leave the caves around dusk (when there is still plenty of light actually). The Bat Hawks are joined in the feast by several other species of raptor. The spot to observe this is from the small hill near the parking lot and the Bat Hawks often rest and sometimes even nest in the huge trees here.

The small patch of lowland forest which surrounds Gomantong Caves (protected to offer a place for the swiftlets to forage) offers good birding too. Some people visit Gomantong en route. We recommend staying for the hunting Bat Hawks however. A visit to the caves can be easily incorporated as an afternoon/evening daytrip from Sungai Kinabatangan.



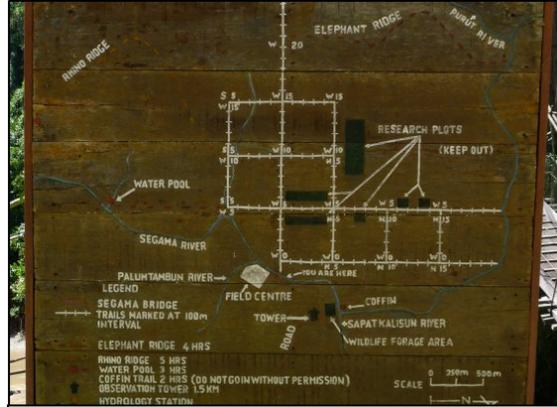
Danum Valley Conservation Area – Danum Valley Field Centre and Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Danum Valley Conservation Area (covering 43,800 ha) is the largest tract of protected lowland dipterocarp forest in Sabah. The area, bordered by the Danum and Segama rivers, represents a continuous transition of lowland forest to hill forest, between about 150 and 1000 m asl (with Gunung Danum as the highest peak). At about 80 kilometers away from the nearest town (Lahad Datu), it is a remote place. Danum Valley is one of the most ancient pristine rainforests in the world and is a must-visit for any world birder. The forest is an incredibly rich ecosystem, with about 275 bird species and well over 100 mammal species recorded. These include seven species of pitta, Bornean Ground-Cuckoo and Bristlehead, Bornean and Black-throated Wren-babbler, etc., etc. Bulwer's Pheasant is also present, but has become hyper rare here lately (we dipped). Among the mammals are Orangutan, Pygmy Elephant, and Sumatran Rhinoceros. In other words, reason enough for a visit!

At Danum Valley, there are two places for accommodation: Danum Valley Field Centre and the more luxurious Borneo Rainforest Lodge. Both take about 2.5 hours to reach from Lahad Datu and are situated about 1.5 hour driving apart. The forest around both places is great. At Borneo Rainforest Lodge, the hiking is a bit easier than at Danum Valley Field Centre, because of better accessible trails with less steep climbs.



Suspension bridge towards the grid at Danum Valley Field Centre.



Trail map of Danum Valley Field Centre's grid trail system.

At Danum Valley Field Centre, most forest birding is done along the Tembaling Waterfall trail (2.7 km one-way) and the so-called *grid*, a system of trails laid out in 500 m squares used for research purposes [movie: [the grid](#)]. The Tembaling Waterfall trail is a bit steep at times, but it is generally a pretty okay trail. The grid system can make for some tough birding, as its trails are laid out independently of the area's geography (and thus runs right through streams and across hills). The first kilometer straight into the grid (marked W0 to W10) is generally well-maintained, but we found some of the side trails to be hard to follow after a few hundred meters. At Danum Valley Field Centre there is a tree platform along the grid system (W6N2). This is somewhat shaky and not in the best state, so at own risk. It does offer a nice view and should provide interesting birding, especially around early morning [movies: [platform from below](#) and [from above](#)]. Connected to the grid system are also the long Rhino and Elephant Ridge trails (the former of which is said to be a spot for Bulwer's Pheasant). Although we have not visited these two long trails ourselves, it is usually advised to visit these trails with a guide.

At Borneo Rainforest Rainforest Lodge, birding can be done on any of the trails on both sides of the river. Across the river from the lodge you find the Elephant trail (which follows the river) and Coffin Cliff trail. The Coffin Cliff trail has two waterfalls (Fairy Fall and Serpent Falls) and passes a hill view point. On the other side of the lodge chalets, near the entrance road, you find trails such as the Hornbill and Sapa Babandil trails [movie: [Hornbill trail](#)]. There is also a great canopy walkway here, which starts and ends at the entrance road. The walkway proved good for birding: it offers a close look into life in the canopy, plus great panorama views of forest below.



Sungai Danum in front of Borneo Rainforest Lodge restaurant.

The entrance roads to both sites can be very productive, too. Because of the secondary structure of the surrounding forest and because there is much more overview here, you can expect to encounter a different set of birds. Chances of seeing raptors and hornbills are also higher here than in the forest.

Birding around the lodges themselves is also productive, and several nice species can be seen right from the porches. The suspension bridge at Danum Valley Field Centre is a good spot to lounge around during the dull parts of the day, additionally providing a good overview of the surroundings. Borneo Rainforest Lodge offers a similar option from the restaurant area. We used these stake-outs often, as Great-billed Heron is observed at both regularly. Alas, the heron managed to elude us. We did come across a lot of other niceties this way.

Night walks and drives, to spot nocturnal birds and mammals, are offered at both sites. We joined one at Danum Valley Field Centre, which proved rather interesting. At Borneo Rainforest Lodge, we ended up skipping them as we were tired.

While the birding is notably hard at Danum Valley, it can be incredibly productive and rewarding. In other words, spending at least a week here is more than recommended.



Canopy walkway at Borneo Rainforest Lodge. Sanctuary.

Coast and cultivated areas

Surroundings Kota Kinabalu

While in Kota Kinabalu (often referred to as KK), we birded a bit around town as well. The bay along the city center holds terns and egrets, including Chinese Egret, and can be overlooked from the waterfront. The hills bordering and overlooking the city center are home to some typical open area species. We found the area around Atkinson Clock Tower quite nice.

On the other side of the hills, Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary (formerly known as Kota Kinabalu Wetland Sanctuary) is situated. A boardwalk system crosses this fragment of mangrove forest, so you can actually walk straight through it, making it an interesting experience. It is a good spot to connect with some herons (including a colony of Purple Herons at the bird hide), kingfishers and waders.

A bit further north along the coast is Likas Bay, with a patch of wetland area called Likas Lagoon on the other side of the busy road. You can simply walk around it along the road. This area is good for resident wetland species, such as Purple Swamphen and White-browed Crake and wintering waders.

South of the city center, there is a tiny remnant patch of beach at Lok Kawi. This is possibly the best spot left for waders in the Kota Kinabalu area (including breeding Malaysian Plover). Nearby is Tanjung Aru beach, which itself is not great for birding, but is situated next to a small park (*Taman Prince Philip*). This park is home to an exotic population of Blue-naped Parrots and a good spot for open area species such as Pied Triller and Asian Koel.



Kota Kinabalu City Bird Sanctuary.

The small bay overlooking Sutera Harbour Resort is another Kota Kinabalu spot for (wintering) waders, such as Pacific Golden Plover and Grey-tailed Tattler. You will know you have the right spot if you are looking at the Sutera Harbour Resort sign on a rocky shore, opposite from some shacks built in the water.



Prince Philip Park in Kota Kinabalu.



Sutera Harbour Resort sign.

Kota Belud paddyfields

Surrounding the city of Kota Belud, about 1.5 hour driving from Kota Kinabalu, are some large paddyfield areas. We visited (amongst others) the Tempasuk paddyfields, which are supposedly some of the best in Sabah. Birding is done along quiet roads (out in the open, exposed to the elements, so do not forget your sun lotion!). During wintering/migration seasons, you can find plenty of Wood and Marsh Sandpipers, Long-toed Stints and Oriental Pratincoles here. Add crakes, bitterns and pond herons, and you know you are in for a good time.



Hills and mountains

Rafflesia Information Centre

Since several years the northernmost extension of the Crocker Range has been added to the birder's agenda. Rafflesia Information Centre is at an intermediate elevation (approximately 1,400 m asl) compared to Kinabalu National Park and Poring Hot Springs. For this reason it is possible to tick birds at Rafflesia Information Centre which are difficult to nearly impossible on the other regularly birded spots at higher elevation.

All three endemic Barbets are present here, of which two (Bornean and Mountain) are only very sparsely distributed elsewhere on the beaten track. You will not encounter Bornean Leafbird and Bornean Bulbul on the other spots.



Entrance gate of Rafflesia Information Centre.



Fruithunter and Whitehead's Spiderhunter, both regularly observed here, are species you had better catch when you can, because these can make a birder's life difficult on Mount Kinabalu. You get the point: this spot should not be excluded in any Sabah trip.

Most birders only spend a couple of hours here en route, but it is also possible to stay at one of the two resorts 5 to 7 km from the center (like we did). Most birders on a short day visit still know to connect with the relevant species, though. Whether fruiting trees are present or not will definitely influence the success rate. In the absence of these, we had to work hard for our targets (rewarding work still).

Birding has to be done roadside, which can be a bit frustrating, especially if you are making sound recordings [movie: [roadside birding](#)]. There is however a clearing on the left side of the road towards Tambunan just a couple of hundred meters from Rafflesia Information Centre, which offers a nice change of scenery from all the roadside birding. At this spot you have a good overview (Mountain Serpent Eagle!). We did not walk downhill towards Tambunan too far, but other people sometimes do this with good results (e.g. Pygmy Ibon).



Montane forest covering the Crocker Range.

Kinabalu National Park

Mount Kinabalu is a relatively isolated volcano, which with its 4,101 meters is the highest point on Borneo. Kinabalu National Park, with its headquarters situated on a modest 1,563 meters above sea level, serves as a base for birdwatchers. The park consists mostly of overwhelming, misty, moss-covered cloud forest, full of pitcher plants and other brilliant plant life.

Although Kinabalu National Park is very touristy, nearly everybody goes there to climb the summit. As a result, the system of trails lower down is practically deserted. As the majority of Borneo's montane species can be encountered along these great trails, this is where most birding concentrates. Especially the Liwagu trail, which for a long stretch parallels the Liwagu river, provides stunning scenery [movie: [Liwagu trail](#)]. The Silau Silau can also be most enchanting, especially when covered in mist during the afternoon [movie: [cloud forest along Silau Silau trail](#)]. We mostly visited the Bukit Ular trail (only one kilometer in length) and had great success here. Especially the 500m marker seems to be a reliable spot for major targets such as Whitehead's Trogon and Broadbill and both Everett's and Orange-headed Thrush. Another possibility for rewarding birding is simply walking along the Power Station road. The area surrounding the lodges and headquarters also offers good birding.





Cloud forest along the Silau Silau trail.

From the Timpohon Gate, situated at 1,800 m asl, the summit trail starts. Purely from an avifaunal point of view it is not necessary to climb all the way to the summit (although this does strongly reduce your chances on seeing Island Thrush). Reaching the top is not allowed without being accompanied by a guide. You can, however, track along the first 4 kilometers of the trail (up to Layang-Layang hut, where the new Mesilau trail branches off) on your own. Here it is possible to encounter Borneo's highest elevation endemic: Kinabalu Friendly Bush Warbler. All other endemics can be encountered on the other trails or from the gate itself, although Mountain Black-eye and Pale-faced

Bulbul (a split from Flavescent *Pycnonotus flavesceus*) are more common along the summit trail. We managed to pick the worst day of our stay for our ascent and had rain for most of the time. As a consequence, we did poorly and even dipped the bloody bush warbler. Also make sure to check the dumpster just before the Timpohon gate as it attracts squirrels, laughingthrushes and Bornean Whistling Thrush.

Poring Hot Springs

On the lower slopes of Mount Kinabalu, about 40 km southeast and a two hour drive from Kinabalu National Park, Poring Hot Springs is situated. At about 600 m asl, Poring Hot Springs qualifies as hill forest. The hot springs themselves have been turned into an artificial array of Jacuzzi-like pools and are of not much interest to birders, unless you enjoy public swimming pools. The hill forest around the area, on the other hand, is in pristine state.

The forest harbors a different set of birds compared to both the mountains and lowlands. Among these are two holy grails, namely Hose's Broadbill and Blue-banded Pitta (admitted, the latter is also possible at Danum Valley). These two gems are however very difficult to catch up with. Be mentally prepared that dipping them is a realistic scenario (we are still recovering from our consequential breakdown). Furthermore, several other species are definitely easier here than at the other usual spots, including White-necked Babbler and Dark Blue Flycatcher.

Birding is mostly done along the Langanan Waterfall trail. The first half of this 3.5 km long trail is very steep, but it levels off after that. We found the trail completely deprived of other people. Along the way to Langanan Waterfall, there is a trail branching off to another, smaller waterfall (forgot the name). However, we found it neglected and lost the trail somewhere halfway. The 120 meter high Langanan Waterfall itself is real eye candy, and it is possible to take a dip in the pool below the waterfall, too.

Poring Hot Springs also has a very productive canopy walkway. It is very shaky, so if there are other tourists around, birding is quite impossible (except from the tree platforms). It is however possible, if asked for a day in advance, to reserve this walkway before it opens (or after it closes). We spent one morning (from 5:30 to 8:00 AM opening time and a further 1.5 hour with minor tourist disturbance) here and that was a very pleasant experience. This seems to be a reliable spot to catch up with Banded Broadbill for example.



Langanan waterfall. [[movie](#)]

Birding around Poring Hot Spring's park/lodge grounds is also rewarding. Along the campsite and football field several specialties can be observed, such as Yellow-bellied Warbler and even Scaly-breasted Bulbul. We also paid a visit to the Tropical Garden. This place turned out to be depressing as it contained caged birds in a poor state of health (both mentally and physically). Our spirits were lifted, however, when we encountered an extremely cooperative Rufous-collared Kingfisher (no, this one was not in a cage).

Off-shore islands

Most birders include a visit to an offshore island while in Sabah, to come to terms with some of the island specialties. Pulau Manukan and Pulau Tiga are the two most popular (and relatively inexpensive) options near Kota Kinabalu, but other options include Pulau Mantanani (near Kota Belud) and Pulau Sipadan (on the east coast of Sabah; daytrips only).

We decided to go for the most expensive option: Pulau Mantanani. Pulau Mantanani requires a stay of multiple days, whereas for the other islands a (half a) day trip suffices (although overnight stays are also possible at e.g. Pula Manukan and Pulau Tiga).

Pulau Mantanani

Pulau Mantanani is located roughly 45 minutes by boat from Kuala Abai (a tiny coastal village near Kota Belud). Although a visit to Mantanani means a relatively expensive and time-consuming visit, the avifauna present on this bounty island makes it worth your while. Pulau Mantanani actually comprises two islands: Pulau Mantanani Besar (Large Mantanani), where the resort is located, and Pulau Mantanani Kecil (Small Mantanani). Birding is not the only thing to be done on Pulau Mantanani: beaches and a crisp sea mean sunbathing, snorkeling, and diving are very well possible.

The tiny island Lingisan, right in front of the resort, holds a spectacular frigatebird roost. Watching the frigates come in during late afternoon can be combined with scanning the hills for pigeons. Pulau Mantanani Besar also has a trail starting from the beach next to the resort. This is not too obvious or well-maintained, but you can ask the staff to show you around.



Sunset at Mantanani Besar. The rocky outcrop on the left is Lingisan



Mantanani Besar as seen from Mantanani Kecil.

Although bird density is bigger on Pulau Mantanani Kecil, we only spent one morning walking through the vegetation there [movie: [walking along beach at Mantanani Kecil](#)]. Other people have found this sister island relatively reliable for Nicobar Pigeon, but we had no luck with this one. Luckily the imperial pigeons were more cooperative here. You can ask the resort staff to drop you off by boat.

Keep in mind that Pulau Manukan and Tiga hold Mangrove Whistler and Mangrove Blue Flycatcher, both of which are absent from Pulau Mantanani. Philippine Megapode, which appears to be very shy on Pulau Mantanani (we only managed to see it in flight, despite trying very hard), is probably more

cooperative on Pulau Manukan and Tiga, too.

Costs, accommodation and transport

We arranged nearly everything for this trip in advance via e-mail, with the exception of our accommodation in the Crocker Range (Gunung Alab Resort, which does not have a website or e-mail address). We started the planning and booking process several months prior to our trip, which proved a good strategy as it may sometimes take a while to make a booking final. In the end, the whole trip went very smoothly.

All prices are in Malaysian Ringgits (RM), but indications in Euros (€), based on the exchange rates in May/June 2009, are also given. Do note that these indications may no longer be accurate, as exchange rates tend to fluctuate. Check [XE's currency converter](#) for current rates.

Flights

International flight – We flew from Amsterdam to Kota Kinabalu (via Singapore) with Singapore Airlines (SQ323) and Silk Air (SQ5092). We paid EUR 1080 per person, booked via the Dutch website [Cheap Tickets](#). Singapore Airlines is greatly recommended, for their (relatively) comfortable planes, personal multimedia system (including the latest movies on demand), relatively okay airline food, and friendly good-looking flight attendants.

Cheaper flights are available, e.g. via Cathay Pacific or by flying to Kuala Lumpur and taking a domestic flight from there. We chose not to go for the cheapest option, as this would have resulted in significantly more traveling time.

Domestic flights – We booked two flights via [MASwings](#), which can easily be done online. The first one was from Kota Kinabalu to Sandakan (MH3032, departure 9:05 AM, RM131 or ≈ €28 per person) and the second one from Lahad Datu to Kota Kinabalu (MH3023, departure 5:25 PM, RM131 or ≈ €28 per person). The flight to Sandakan was right on time, but we had an hour delay on the flight from Lahad Datu, as the plane arrived late. This did not lead to any problems, though.



Mount Kinabalu as seen from our MASwings flight from KK to Sandakan.

Kota Kinabalu

We stayed in Kota Kinabalu on several occasions, as a stop-over place between birding sites. You can skip staying in Kota Kinabalu without any problems, but we decided it would be a nice change of scenery every once in a while (and we did some birding around Kota Kinabalu as well). We usually had dinner at the Waterfront Esplanade, which has plenty of restaurants overlooking the ocean (and Pulau Gaya). We recommend Aesha's Corner for great and cheap Malaysian food (their satay is mouth-watering!).

D'Borneo Hotel – We booked a standard twin room for four nights (March 1, 15, 16 and 27). We paid RM 147 (or ≈ €31) per room per night, including breakfast. Facilities include private bathroom (hot water), AC, TV, and free newspaper. Rooms were generally okay, although we had to change rooms the first night because the AC was leaking water. There was also a smell of fish around the hallways (originating from the nearby Filipino market) on the first day. Hotel staff was always friendly and helpful and the affordable room rates and good location (near the Kota Kinabalu Waterfront) are a plus.

[Hyatt Regency Kinabalu](#) – For our last night in Sabah (March 30), we decided to indulge ourselves and booked a night at the more luxurious Hyatt Regency hotel. We paid RM 322 (or \approx €68) for an ocean view twin room, without breakfast. Room facilities include AC, TV, in-room internet connection (RM 54 or \approx €11.50 for 24 hours; quite slow), marbled bath, etc. Relatively expensive, but we felt it was worth it after a long month of birding. Breakfast was had outside of the hotel, as the hotel itself was relatively expensive. Options are plenty, as the hotel is located conveniently in the midst of Kota Kinabalu's city center. If you are interested in books, be sure to pay a visit to [Borneo Books 2](#) as well. This bookstore, situated on the second floor in the Wisma Merdeka shopping mall (next to the hotel), has a large selection of nature-related books.



Sepilok, Sungai Kinabatangan and Gomantong caves

We booked a package deal with Robert Chong (e-mail: labukbb@yahoo.com) and paid RM 2480 per person. This included all meals and accommodation at Sepilok (1 night) and Sungai Kinabatangan (4 nights), non-alcoholic drinks, 8 boat rides (including one night trip), all transport (pick-up from Sandakan airport and drop-off at Borneo Nature Tours office in Lahad Datu), and an afternoon excursion to Gomantong Caves. Not included were beers and entrance fee to Gomantong Caves (RM 30 or \approx €6 p.p. and per camera). Remember that Robert is a popular man and thus has quite a busy schedule these days, so especially here it is important to book early.

[Sepilok Forest Edge Resort](#) – Standard twin bed chalet. This is a spacious resort, situated (as you might have guessed) at the forest edge, in a lush green garden setting. The wooden chalets are small, but charming and clean, with private bathroom (hot water), fan and small veranda overlooking the garden. The resort is run by Robert Chong's wife Annie, and she does a great job. Food is excellent here.

[Kinabatangan Jungle Camp](#) – Twin room. A relatively new camp, quite far away from most other camps along the river. The rooms are small, but adequate, with fan and private bathroom (including hot water) attached. Food is great and is usually served buffet-style, depending on the number of visitors staying at the camp.



Staff quarters of Kinabatangan Jungle Camp (the actual camp is behind this).

Danum Valley Conservation Area – Danum Valley Field Centre and Borneo Rainforest Lodge

Booked online as a package with [Borneo Nature Tours](#). E-mail contact was quick at first, but sometimes a reminder e-mail was necessary to get things going again. We paid RM 2768 (or \approx €587) per person, including permits, all meals and accommodation at Danum Valley Field Centre (6 nights) and Borneo Rainforest Lodge (2 nights) and all transport (from the Borneo Nature Tours office in Lahad Datu to Danum Valley Field Centre, from Danum Valley Field Centre to Borneo Rainforest Lodge, and from Borneo Rainforest Lodge to Lahad Datu airport again). Also included were forest rangers, for two hours at Danum Valley Field Centre and for all days at Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

We ended up not using any guides at all, as we preferred not to be in the company of loud non-birding tourists and would rather walk around on our own at convenient birding times. At Danum Valley Field Centre the staff did not appear to have a problem with this (although they prefer to know when you are in the forest) and at Borneo Rainforest Lodge the staff was okay with us not using guides as we had already experience walking around by ourselves on our prior visit at Danum Valley Field Centre. We actually did not realize guiding service was included at Borneo Rainforest Lodge until we got there. If we had known in advance, maybe we could have arranged a discount? It is possible to arrange a birding guide (such as the famous Wang Kong) in advance. At Danum Valley Field Centre night drives can be arranged additionally for RM 160 per car. We joined one with eight people in total (so paid RM 20 or \approx €4 p.p.) and it did not disappoint. Night drives and walks are included at Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

[Danum Valley Field Centre](#) – The relatively cheap and basic option for Danum. This is relative indeed: the accommodation and food are still very good and the price is still a bit on the steep side. The field center is spread out over a large area along Sungai Segama and consists of several buildings, including an education hall, dormitory, restaurant, and reception/gift store. We stayed at the resthouse, a row of twin bed rooms with private bathrooms, conveniently situated next to the restaurant. These rooms are recommended, as they are quite big and comfortable. Meals are served buffet-style at fixed times (breakfast from 7-8 AM, lunch from noon to 1 PM, dinner from 7:15 to 8 PM). Do not expect much else in terms of service, though, unless you ask for it (try the people at the reception or kitchen, if there is anyone there).



Danum Valley Field Centre, as seen from the suspension bridge.

[Borneo Rainforest Lodge](#) – A very expensive, but also ridiculously luxurious lodge along the beautiful banks of Sungai Danum. The lodge has several chalets connected by a boardwalk system. We had a ‘standard’ chalet, with minibar, fan, nice bathroom (including a rain shower), small porch, and comfortable beds. The deluxe chalets also have a Jacuzzi on the porch. All meals were served buffet-style in the large open dining area (also with view on the river). Think “table for two?” and plenty, plenty of good food (both western and Asian kitchen).



Borneo Rainforest Lodge’s restaurant building.

Single day of birding at Kota Belud, Tuaran and Kota Kinabalu

We contacted Jason Bugay Reyes (e-mail: horukuru@yahoo.com), a Kota Kinabalu-based birdwatcher and guide, if he could offer his guidance for a day of birding around Kota Kinabalu, Tuaran and Kota Belud. We paid RM 550 (or \approx €116) for a day, including transport and a late morning coffee stop. Jason picked us up at our hotel around 6 AM and dropped us off again in the late afternoon. We drove from Kota Kinabalu to Kota Belud (Tempasuk paddyfields and surroundings) and via Tuaran back to Kota Kinabalu, where we birded Lok Kawi and Tanjung Aru (II) beaches, Prince Philip Park, and Sutera Harbour. Jason is a nice and enthusiastic guy and we thoroughly recommend his services. Visit Jason's weblog [here](#) (and see [this link](#) for a report of our day out with him).



Left: Jason (left) and Ben digiscoping a pond heron sp. at Tempasuk paddyfields.

Right: Ben (left) and Sander observing waders at Lok Kawi beach. Photo by [Jason Bugay Reyes](#).

Rafflesia Information Centre (Crocker Range)

We visited the Crocker Range, where we intended to stay at the Gunung Alab Resort, without any prior arrangements. It would be convenient to have a rental car at your disposal here, but we did not. Getting transport to the site is no problem, but getting back is the tricky part. There are buses passing to Kota Kinabalu, but these are not too regular and can be full. If you plan to continue to e.g. Poring or Mount Kinabalu (like we did), you either have to switch buses a few times or try to charter a taxi. We did the latter – the same taxi driver that brought us from Kota Kinabalu to Gunung Alab Resort picked us up and brought us to Kinabalu National Park (via the bumpy Tambunan – Ranau road) as well.

Gunung Alab Resort – We stayed at this basic roadside hotel, situated about 6 kilometers before the Rafflesia Information Centre (along the Kota Kinabalu – Tambunan road). The place gets plenty of customers who stop by for lunch or a cup of coffee, but it appeared that not many people stay for the night (we were in fact the only ones during our stay). We booked two rooms (as they only have double bed rooms), one of RM 50 (\approx €11) and one of RM 70 (\approx €15) per night. Both rooms were large (and quite cold and empty), with attached bathroom and brilliant view over the rolling mountains of the Crocker Range. The RM 70 room supposedly had hot water, but we (including the owner himself) could not get it to work.



There is an electric kettle to boil water in the room, though. Electricity is available at limited times (in the evening), so we were (to our surprise) able to use our laptop here.

The food was great and quite cheap here, too, and the people at the Gunung Alab Resort can pack lunch for you. As we had no transport of our own, we asked if we could be dropped off and picked up at Rafflesia Information Centre on the day and subsequent morning we spent birding there. That was no problem, and did not even cost us any extra.

Kinabalu National Park and Poring Hot Springs

We booked our stays inside Kinabalu National Park and Poring Hot Springs with [Sutera Sanctuary Lodges](#), who run the accommodation inside both parks. For five nights at Kinabalu National Park's Hill Lodge, we paid RM 1925 (\approx €390) and for three night's at Poring Hot Springs's Serendit Twin Share, we paid RM 975 (\approx €198), both including breakfast. This was all paid in advance to SSL via credit card – upon check-in at both sites we only needed to show our booking confirmation.

As Sutera Sanctuary Lodges have a monopoly position within both parks, they can afford to raise prices each year (and they happily seem to do so). Much cheaper accommodation is available outside the parks, but you need to be willing to travel the extra distance. At Kinabalu National Park, for example, you can stay at the [D'Villa Rina Ria Lodge](#) about 500 meters from the entrance.

For both Kinabalu National Park and Poring Hot Springs, paying a conservation fee (a polite term for entrance ticket) of RM 15 (\approx €3) per person is required. It is valid for one day, or three days if you are staying inside the park, and can be used at both sites. A permit for entering Kinabalu National Park's summit trail up to Layang-Layang costs RM 10 (\approx €2) p.p. A ticket for the canopy walkway at Poring Hot Springs during regular hours is RM 5 (\approx €1) p.p. There is a separate fee for (video) cameras, but we forgot how much that was exactly. The price for booking the walkway outside regular hours is RM 60 (\approx €12) for 1-3 people, and RM 20 (\approx €4) per person if you are with more than three people. A small entrance fee is required for the tropical garden at Poring Hot Springs (again, we forgot how much exactly).

Inside Kinabalu National Park, you can eat at either the Balsam Restaurant (buffet style) or Liwagu Restaurant (à la carte). As the Liwagu Restaurant was just across the road from our Hill Lodge, we ate there nearly all the time. It is really not that expensive and the food is great (both western and Asian kitchen). Drinks are a bit more expensive, on the other hand. Inside the same building, there is also a small souvenir shop which sells water and the like at high prices. There is also a restaurant (of which we forgot the name) across the road from the park entrance: they offer cheap food, but the quality was not quite what we expected, so we only went there once. They also sell water and snacks and such at a better price than inside the park.

At Poring Hot Springs, there is a single restaurant inside the park (overlooking the swimming pools) called the Rainforest Restaurant. However, only breakfast is included there and the price for a buffet lunch (which we had once) turned out to be quite steep. Luckily, a short venture outside the park entrance led us to the neat-looking Round Inn (opposite to the gate to the left). This is the place you would want to take your meals at: great and cheap food and refreshing fruit juices. The Round Inn also offers a few cheap rooms and they have internet access at the restaurant area.

[Hill Lodge](#) – The Hill Lodges are a series of semi-detached twin bedroom chalets. These chalets are both spacious and comfortable, with AC, private bathroom, small porch and in-room water boiler. We booked this lodge because it is the only affordable twin room option inside the park. Conveniently, it is also the one most high up. This proved strategic, as we did not have transport of our own and could not manage to get a taxi to drop us off at the Timponon Gate at an early enough time of day.



On the other hand, other people who stayed outside the park have managed to arrange transport, so that should be possible (and the park seems to be open 24/7 anyway). The Hill Lodge is close to the upper part of Silau-Silau trail as well, which makes a good option for an after-lunch stroll. Breakfast coupons were included (to be used at Balsam Restaurant near Kinabalu National Park HQ), but we only used one of these due to the inconvenient schedule.

[Serendit twin share](#) – A small but very clean and comfy twin bedroom inside the Serendit Hostel (the same building that is home to the Sutera Sanctuary Lodges reception). Facilities include large fan, water boiler and shared bathroom (just around the corner, and pretty clean, if you do not mind your daily batch of entomofauna). Breakfast (at the Rainforest Restaurant) was included, but we mostly skipped this and arranged a free lunch via the reception instead.



Pulau Mantanani

We arranged our stay at Pulau Mantanani via [Borneo Sea Adventures](#) (e-mail: borneoseaadventures@yahoo.com), the company that runs the only accommodation on the island: Mantanani Resort. (There seemed to be people building a new resort on Mantanani Kecil, though.) We paid RM 1368 per person (\approx € 290!) for a non-diving package, including all food, accommodation (two nights) and transport (pick-up and drop-off at hotel in Kota Kinabalu, transport from Kuala Abai to Pulau Mantanani by boat).

[Mantanani Resort](#) – A small and laid-back beach/diving resort on Pulau Mantanani Besar. The wooden chalets are big and comfortable (with double beds, private bathroom, and AC which works only when (noisy) generator is on). Meals are scheduled (sort of) and the food was good. The resort is ran by a couple of friendly locals. The office manager of BSA (Debbie Daim) joined us to the island as well, to enjoy a weekend off. The resort itself could use some renovating, but the place definitely has its charms, far away from crowded city life. If you wish to go diving, snorkeling or birdwatching at Mantanani Kecil (a smaller island nearby), you can ask the staff to take you there by boat.



Taxis

For a large part of the trip, transport was already included in the packages we booked. When that was not the case, we had to arrange it ourselves on the spot. For this, we made use of taxis. Transport to and fro the airport (four times in total; RM 20 \approx €4 per trip) was easily arranged at the taxi counter inside the airport. We went from Kota Kinabalu to Gunung Alab Resort (RM 160 \approx €32) and arranged with the taxi driver to pick us up here later and bring us to Kinabalu National Park (RM 300 \approx €64). We ordered a taxi at the Kinabalu National Park HQ to bring us to Poring Hot Springs (RM 85 \approx €18) and ordered one at the reception at Poring Hot Springs to bring us to Kota Kinabalu (RM 220 \approx € 47).

Taxis are by no means the cheapest option; you can definitely cut costs on transport if you go by public transport. For us (and I guess anyone without a rental car), using taxis was however the most comfortable and time-saving option. In other words, we decided to pay the price (it is not that expensive anyway).

General practicalities and tips

Health and safety

General stuff – You are in the tropics, so drink often! Furthermore, put at least the following things in your travel medikit: malaria prophylaxes (Malarone, Lariam), loperamide (such as Diacure or Immodium; against diarrhea), paracetamol, anti-fungal cream, antiseptic fluid (such as Sterilon or Dettol), Oral Rehydration Solution, thermometer, vitamin pills, and plenty of band aids. Just in case.

Leeches and other nasty critters – Sabah is notorious for its leech-infested jungles (and rightly so!). There are two types: the Brown Leech *Haemadipsa zeylandica* and Tiger Leech *H. picta*. The former usually waits among the leaf litter, and quickly crawls up your feet and legs when you stand still. The latter tends to hang on leaves of young vegetation, dropping off when you pass closely. You will also encounter a fair share of mosquitoes (especially in the lowlands near water), sand flies, and horse flies. Protect yourself well and the inconvenience will be significantly reduced. To keep away the bugs, bring DEET (at least 30%) and put it on exposed skin and at those parts of your clothing which provide a place to crawl inside. It is wise to wear long sleeves and pants at most sites, too. As malaria is widespread throughout inland Sabah, do not forget to bring malaria prophylaxes. Use e.g. Malarone (to be taken daily) or Lariam (to be taken once a week).

Leech socks are a must, especially in Danum Valley. These can be bought locally at e.g. Borneo Rainforest Lodge, but these apparently tear easily. We decided to play it safe and ordered a quality pair in advance at [Nomad Travel & Outdoor](#) – these performed well and survived the trip. Check your pants and leech socks regularly, and just flick off anything crawling up your legs. Going off-trail through vegetation increases the chance on leeches significantly (but can help observing particular birds). In case you get bitten still, remember that leeches are harmless (only the bleeding is messy, but do disinfect the wound). We got bitten only a handful of times in the end, in Sepilok, Danum Valley and at Kinabalu National Park (where leech density is actually low). We noticed some crawling up our footwear at Poring Hot Springs too. Leeches do not like DEET, salt, fire, or tobacco. We brought a handy do-it-yourself execution kit comprising tweezers and a lighter. You get the idea.

Food and drinks

Timing of meals – Robert Chong knows birdwatching, so at Sepilok and Sungai Kinabatangan we had timely breakfast. At Danum Valley Field Centre breakfast was served way too late, so we skipped it. It is possible to get packed sandwiches when asked for the day in advance. Furthermore, a hot water tap is available in the restaurant area, so we bought instant noodles beforehand in Lahad Datu. At Borneo Rainforest Lodge early breakfast can be requested a day in advance. At Kinabalu National Park breakfast is buffet style and early breakfast is not possible (at least inside the park). In most cases, we again resorted to instant noodles (a water boiler was available in our lodge) or we simply skipped breakfast altogether (which makes lunch that much more rewarding). At Poring Hot Springs it was the same story. We decided to always have lunch in the afternoon (in the lowlands a necessity as we had to replenish our water supplies) but other people regularly choose to skip this. (But of course no one in his right mind would skip a meal at Borneo Rainforest Lodge.) As the afternoons, especially at Mount Kinabalu, have drowsy periods anyway, you can plan lunch strategically. Sometimes you can take it early, or sometimes you can save birding time by eating a bit later during the day. We had no problem combining dinner into our schedule. It may be a good idea to state in advance when breakfast is not required, as you may get a discount. We had not thought this through, so paid for some meals we did not make use of in the end. Dinner was never a problem.

Beer – Borneo holds a lot of brilliant birds. Therefore there are plenty of occasions to celebrate. Tiger beer is your friend. Do note that there is no beer available in Danum Valley Field Centre. There is however a refrigerator, so it is a good idea to buy beer in Lahad Datu (we wish we had known in advance!). All the other places sold beer.

Weather and seasonality

Climate – Very hot and humid, especially in Danum Valley. Be prepared that you will be soaked in sweat from the moment you get up there. Also realize that you will lose a lot of water this way. Also at Poring Hot Springs and even at Rafflesia Information Centre it is still quite warm; only at Kinabalu National Park temperatures are a bit more reasonable. At places where there is no canopy to conceal you from the burning sun, use sunscreen, sunglasses and hats. As you will be hot no matter what you wear, it is recommended to wear long sleeves. This offers protection against sun and mosquitoes and the like.

Rain season – In Sabah, the wet/rainy season starts around November and ends in the course of March, with January generally being the wettest month. As we visited in March, we were birding in the transition period from wet to (relatively!) dry. This meant high temperatures and afternoon downpours (of one or more hours) on most days [movie: [afternoon shower in Crocker Range](#)]. The latter is not necessarily a problem if you take it into account when birding. During our stay at Pulau Mantanani, we finished off in style with clear blue skies.

Fruiting trees – We had the strategic disadvantage that we practically did not encounter any fruiting trees during this trip. Apparently fruiting is somewhat tied to seasonality (June may be a good month), but we had no idea and did not anticipate on this. Groups as hornbills and bulbuls proved to be rather difficult to connect with and we did especially poorly with pigeons. Rafflesia Information Centre took us a bit more effort than what is usually necessary. For Hose's Broadbill a fruiting tree seems to be a must.

Winter visitors and passage migrants – An advantage of a visit in the winter half year is that you can catch up with wintering visitors and passage migrants. These include plenty of waders and wetland birds around the coast and paddyfields, but also flycatchers and thrushes and the like in the forests. And there is the off chance of Blue-winged Pitta, too.

Birding night and day – We ended up so wasted each evening that we did not really focus on night birds. Still, it should be mentioned that Borneo holds several cool nocturnal species, so night drives and walks are definitely worth the effort if you can bring yourself to it.

Other stuff

Internet – At Borneo Rainforest Lodge and Kinabalu National Park HQ internet is available. Danum Valley Field Centre supposedly has internet access at the office building uphill, but it was said to be broken at the time we were there.

Laundry service – Laundry service was available at all places, or so it seemed. We made use of the laundry services at Kinabatangan Jungle Camp, Danum Valley Field Centre, Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Kinabalu National Park, and D'Borneo Hotel. And we never lost a sock!

Telescope – We were very happy to have brought a telescope with us. We could make great use of it while birding Sungai Kinabatangan, during roadside birding and when we were on Pulau Mantanani. There are however a lot of situations where bringing a scope is not useful at all. If we would have brought it while walking the grid at Danum Valley Field Centre for example, we would probably have died from exhaustion. So you should also be willing to (often!) leave it behind in the lodge. To lessen the strain in your arms and neck, a Finnstick is recommended for casual roadside birding and scoping riverbanks and fruiting trees.

Language – Most Sabahans speak at least a bit of English, especially at places where tourism is common.

Literature etc.

Books and field guides

- **MacKinnon, J. & Phillips, K., 1993.** *A Field Guide to the Birds of the Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali* – The key fieldguide. However, be aware however that this book has its flaws. The drawings are not always adequate, especially for the more difficult groups where you need them the most (personal worst is Buff-vented Bulbul). Also there are quite some mistakes in the text.
- **Smythies B.E. & Davison, G.W.H., 1999.** *The Birds of Borneo* – This is not a book to simply put in your backpack. It is a great resource however. The paintings are dated (but this has its charm too). We bought two copies in Kota Kinabalu at the end of our visit at [Borneo Books 2](#) on the second floor of Wisma Merdeka for the reasonable price of RM 270 (≈ €55; tip!).
- **Mann, C., 2008.** *The Birds of Borneo* – Annotated checklist. A valuable resource, but no use taking this with you in the field.
- **Myers, S. 2009.** *Birds of Borneo: Brunei, Sabah, Sarawak, and Kalimantan.* – A totally new field guide to the birds of Borneo, not yet published at the moment of writing this. Apparently, this guide includes nearly 1600 color illustrations, 630 color distribution maps and information on recently split species. For more information, see the [website of Princeton University Press](#).
- **Sheldon, F.H., Moyle, R.G. & Kennard, J., 2001.** *Ornithology of Sabah* – A very detailed publication (in the Ornithological Monographs series). It includes an annotated checklist, gazetteer, bibliography and more. Available on the [web](#).
- **Robson, C., 2005.** *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia* – A good additional guide for migrants for example.
- **Davison, G.W.H. & Fook, C.Y., 1996.** *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Borneo* – There are several picture guides available covering the Sunda region, including this one about Borneo. It is very incomplete, but sometimes can be useful if the drawings do not completely cut it.



Websites and DVDs

- [Oriental Bird Images](#) – Brilliant online collection of bird pictures. Make sure to skim through it beforehand. For example to know what the Buff-vented Bulbul does look like.
- [Xeno-Canto Asia](#) – A great online database for sound recordings (in mp3 format), with many species and recordings from Sabah. And no, we are not only promoting it because Sander is on the XC team...
- [DVD Birds of Tropical Asia 3](#) – Compiled by Jelle Scharringa. Another good source of sound recordings.

Trip reports

There are dozens of Sabah trip reports available on the internet. Make sure to check [Travelling Birder](#) (select Malaysia) for a comprehensive overview. The most important trip reports we consulted both before and during our trip were the following:

- [Hans Matheve et al. 2008](#)
- [Tim Mitzen 2008](#)
- [Paul Sharp 2007](#)
- [Erling Krabbe et al. 2003](#)
- [Birdtour Asia's collection of Sabah reports](#)
- Tan Gim Cheong et al. 2007 – Borneo Birding Part 1-5. Birding Snippets.

Other wildlife

There is of course a lot of other wildlife on Borneo too, and there have been quite some books published, for example:

- **Payne, J., Francis, C.M., Phillipps, K., 1998. *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo*** – A pretty comprehensive and well-illustrated field guide. Especially a must if you are willing to try and put a name on all those squirrels...
- **Das, I., 2004. *Lizards of Borneo*** – A pocket-sized picture guide, presenting a selection of the huge lizard variety present on Borneo. Occasionally nice to have at hand.
- **Das, I., 2006. *A photographic Guide to Snakes and other reptiles of Borneo*** – Similar to the former, but focusing mainly on snakes. Still it contains some lizards, turtles and crocodiles. By no means complete and not all pictures are that useful, but it is a recommended guide to take with you.
- **Inger, R.F. & Stuebing R.B., 2005. *A field guide to the Frogs of Borneo (second edition)*** – This book is not really suitable as a field guide, but a nice reference nonetheless, on the scarce moments you actually see a frog (whereas you will hear plenty!).
- **Stuebing, R.B. & Inger, R.F., 1999. *A field guide to the Snakes of Borneo*** – This guide, containing photographs, is a little more complete than the guide by Das. However, still not all species are illustrated. Again, its size makes it not really suitable as a field guide.
- **Liat, L.B. & Das, I., 1999. *Turtles of Borneo and peninsular Malaysia*** – For the sake of consistency we mention this work too. We did not encounter a single turtle and if our experiences are representative it is probably a good idea to just identify the occasional turtle using Das (2006) or after your trip instead of carrying along this sizable book.

Of course biodiversity does not end with a backbone. Come to think of it, we have not even dealt with fish. Furthermore, there are also loads of cool insects and plants to be seen, and there are plenty of publications out there. For a selection of titles, check out the website of [Natural History Publications](#) (Borneo) or the website of [Borneo Books](#).

Checklist

We offer a bit more (juicy) details on selected species which we think may be useful. Furthermore we provide an overview of all our observation in the form of a complete checklist. This section is a bit long, but hey, this is a report of a birdwatching trip after all. Do not hesitate to contact us for additional info, also on species not elaborated upon here.

Notes on selected species

Abbreviations – BRL = Borneo Rainforest Lodge; DVFC = Danum Valley Field Centre; KJC = Kinabatangan Jungle Camp KK = Kota Kinabalu; KNP = Kinabalu National Park; SK = Sungai Kinabatangan; PHS = Poring Hot Springs; RIC = Rafflesia Information Centre

Philippine Megapode

We heard this species regularly (an amazing sound!) at Pulau Mantanani. Seeing them was another story. We ended up flushing them quite often (on first impression they reminded us of a raptor or heron), but did not manage to see one on the ground. Density is definitely higher on Mantanani Kecil, but we also recorded them along the trail behind Mantanani Resort.

Red-breasted Partridge

Although getting to hear this species is no problem at KNP, getting to see it is more difficult. Best observation was of a party of four, foraging on the start of the summit trail on our way back between waterfall and boardwalk (around noon). Also encountered thrice on the Bukit Ular trail. A very cool experience at this spot was to stand in the early morning (6:50 AM) amidst a group of birds which were calling from extremely close by. One bird came out of cover and ran past, showing well in the process.

Chestnut-necklaced Partridge [sounds: [XC33673](#) | [XC33674](#)]

Heard several times at SK and a couple got especially close along the Menanggal tributary. At DVFC we again heard this species ridiculously close along entrance road. Alas we did not manage to see it.

Crimson-headed Partridge

This partridge seemed to be more common than Red-breasted at KNP, based on vocalizations. However, it also appeared more difficult to see. We heard them at frustratingly close range. Eventually we managed to see them on four occasions along the Bukit Ular trail. Also heard in the distance at RIC.

Crested Partridge

Seen once at DVFC, where at least two males and a female crossed the grid, just past W3N0. Although they were in their usual rush, it was a very nice observation. Those red tufts are the bomb!

Bornean Crested Fireback

A party of four (two males and two females) came foraging regularly in the late afternoon on the road toward the campsite at DVFC. On one occasion they were joined by a Bearded Pig. A Lophura sp. was observed along the Tembaling waterfall trail. Should we make up a fancy story that it might have been Bulwer's? Frankly, we could not see anything of it. A showy pair came foraging around the lodges at BRL every late afternoon. When you observe them from the boardwalk, the birds appear rather tame, but once you climb down they quickly scurry off.



Great Argus

The territorial males call regularly, sometimes tantalizingly close. We managed to only glimpse one individual thrice along the Tembaling waterfall trail at DVFC. Although glimpses got better and better, they were still not satisfactory. The bird had a dancing ground on the trail, just at the top of the steep ascent on the start of the trail (you will recognize it when you crawl up). We did not know the birds timetable, but this must be a good stake-out. Supposedly it is very well possible to get decent views at BRL too.

Wandering Whistling Duck

We saw a group of 13 flying around at the paddyfields near Kota Belud. Unfortunately they kept their distance.

Storm's Stork

We encountered eight birds in total at SK and had great views of a bird perched close by along the Menanggol tributary. The tame bird Chiko, raised by Chong, was present around the camp site during our stay, snacking on the kitchen leftovers.



Storm's Stork along Menanggol tributary.



Lesser Adjutants along Sungai Kinabatangan.

Lesser Adjutant

A party of four was seen very well along SK, first standing on the riverbank and later perched in a tree. We also had one fly-by.

Malayan Night Heron

An unexpected encounter. We flushed one from right next to the path at BRL along the Sapa Babandil trail, just after the suspension bridge. After having perched for a short while, it disappeared deeper into the forest.

Nycticorax night herons

We were a bit surprised when we saw a Rufous Night Heron among Black-crowneds during a night cruise on SK. We also visited a small roost in the city center of KK which held both species. Our guide Jason took us there, so we would not be able to tell you where it was exactly. A Rufous Night Heron was also observed at the visitor center at KK Bird Sanctuary.



Rufous Night Heron in KK.

Pond herons

Pond herons in non-breeding plumage are very tricky to identify. We had a fly-by along SK, but could not identify it to species level. Robert Chong had never seen a pond heron at SK before, but surely they cannot be that rare there?

Quite some birds were present on the paddyfields at Kota Belud, but only one bird could be identified as Javan, as it was approaching summer plumage. Chinese should also be possible.

Little Egret

Both a southern (ssp. *nigriceps*) and a northern (nominate) race are present. The former has completely black legs, whereas of the latter the feet are yellow. We saw both forms at the paddyfields near Kota Belud, where the northern race seemed to be the commoner one.

Chinese Egret

This was one of the first birds we saw in KK, simply along the wooden boulevard opposite of the Hyatt Regency Hotel (at the big marlin statue). On the same spot we saw it flying past again during our stop-over prior to our visit to the mountains. The fish market also attracts plenty of Eastern Great Egrets.



Chinese Egret in KK.

Frigatebirds [movie: [frigatebirds gathering near roost](#)]

At Mantanani, three species of frigatebird come in to roost in the evening – Lesser, Greater and Christmas. This spectacle of frigates gliding in at the end of the day, forming a helix at sunset, and only settling for the night as darkness falls, can simply be observed from the resort. It is not an unrealistic scenario to observe all three of them while enjoying a cold beer. Lesser is most abundant and it requires some searching to pick out Christmas; we found only a couple of males, but females were more common. Greater is definitely the scarcest and we only managed to pick out a single male. It appeared to us that the route the birds use to hover to their roost is not fixed. This most likely is due to wind direction. The second of our two evenings at Pulau Mantanani was crappy in comparison to our first.

Jerdon's Baza [movie: [peeking baza](#)]

Nesting in a tall tree near the campsite of DVFC. Only the head was visible.

Bat Hawk [movie: [hunting Bat Hawk](#)]

During the bat exodus at Gomantong Caves, quite some raptors were around, gorging themselves. We saw Brahminy Kite, Rufous-bellied Eagle and an unidentified hawk-eagle, but Peregrine should also be possible. All these birds are amateurs compared to the Bat Hawks; Bat Hawks hardly ever miss! We saw at least two individuals, perched as well as hunting.

Fish-eagles

Lesser is the regular of the two. We had five sightings at SK and saw another one well near the suspension bridge at DVFC. We encountered Grey-headed twice at SK.

Mountain Serpent Eagle [sound: [XC34886](#)]

A pair was displaying at the big clearing at RIC.

Accipiter sp.

We had a brief view of an *Accipiter* sp. at BRL and saw one in the distance at RIC. Most likely these were Besras.

Rufous-bellied Eagle

Encountered four times: at Sepilok Forest Edge Resort, at Gomantong joining in for feasting on the bats, at DVFC along the Kuala Tembaling trail at the point where you can walk tot the river and along the road when we were travelling from DVFC to BRL. The latter bird provided absolutely brilliant views. It was first soaring around, but than decided to perch. This bird is not ugly, we guarantee!

Hawk-eagles

We saw a light morph Changeable Hawk-Eagle carrying a large prey item soaring over the Sepilok Forest Edge Resort. At RIC we saw a distant dark morph. Wallace's Hawk-Eagle was encountered quite regularly along SK, but our only other observation was of a bird perched along the entrance road of DVFC. We saw two juvenile hawk-eagles sp. at Gomantong, but did not dare to clinch the ID. Blyth's Hawk-Eagle was seen twice at DVFC. At RIC we saw a pair flying past close by at RIC. At PHS a single bird flew across the football court and at the canopy walkway a pair was displaying.



Hawk-Eagle sp. at Gomantong. If anyone can ID this, feel free to let us know!

White-fronted Falconet

We eventually saw eight birds at SK, not a bad score. All birds which could be sexed were male. The tiny size of these falcons really became obvious when we saw one devouring a butterfly. In flight these birds actually resemble Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot.

Red-legged Crake

At Tempasuk paddyfields we saw one on distant, but out in the open. This was actually a lifer for our guide Jason (who has been to Tempasuk many times), so most likely a good find!

Waders

The small beach Lok Kawi held about twenty sand plovers, both Greater and Lesser. Among the dozens of wintering Kentish Plovers we found the resident pair of Malaysian Plovers. At the Sutera Harbour Resort (underneath the big sign) we saw a pack of Pacific Golden Plovers. We also encountered this species at Sukau airport. About fifty Long-toed Stints were present at the Tempasuk paddyfields. Among them was a single Temminck's Sandpiper: quite a scarce species in Sabah. Four Terek Sandpipers were foraging among the plovers at Lok Kawi beach. A group of eleven Grey-tailed Tattlers was dozing underneath Sutera Harbour Resort's sign.

Island pigeons

We saw Pied and Grey Imperial and Metallic Pigeons simply from the resort at Mantanani, while scanning the hills. Morning and late afternoon are the best periods to look for them. We saw both imperial pigeons very well on Mantanani Kecil too [movie: [Grey Imperial Pigeon](#)]. By the way, we had Pink-necked Green Pigeon on the island too.



Pied (left) and Grey Imperial Pigeon at Mantanani Kecil.

Short-toed Coucal

One was seen foraging on the ground along the entrance road of BRL in the roadside. We did not make a stop as we were on our way to a pitta stake-out and were completely focused on those birds. What a mistake-a to make-a!

Bornean Ground Cuckoo [sounds: [XC33675](#) | [XC33676](#)]

Catching up with this superb bird really was a highlight among highlights. We had brilliant views of two individuals, both along the Menanggol tributary at SK. At the end of our first morning, after some fruitless searching at other places (ground cuckoo wise that is, we saw plenty of other goodies), we finally got a distant response. Robert kept mimicking the cuckoo, and slowly the bird homed in on us. Then Robert got a phonecall! We thought we had lost our chance, but Robert continued coo-ing and after a tantalizing wait, the bird suddenly boomed from close by. Then the incredibly sharp boatman Romsy saw some movement in the vegetation. It was the tail of the ground cuckoo, which the bird pumped down at each call. We carefully paddled a bit further up the tributary, so we could look through the vegetation. This way we got the bird in full view. It continued called vigorously and even spent some time preening. Eventually it jumped of its perched and ran off, leaving four very happy people in the boat. On our way back we got involved in a territorial dispute along the main river, where three different birds were calling towards each other. We could hear these birds very well. The sounds this species produces are much more intricate than the recordings we had heard before suggest. The next morning, we managed to tempt one of these birds to respond again. Later that morning we went up the Menanggol tributary again. A bit further upstream than yesterday, Robert managed to provoke a bird to come and check us out. This time, the wall of vegetation shielding the bank where the cuckoo was calling from was just too dense. We tried a different strategy: we pushed through the plant cover ran the boat into the bank itself. Now suddenly we had a brilliant overview of the forest floor. If the cuckoo would cooperate, this promised to be good! We heard that the bird was approaching, as its calls were getting closer and closer. We tried to look as far ahead as possible in the direction where the bird was supposed to appear. Suddenly it came running towards us along the bank. Then it went for a full stop – just like the roadrunner. Now it slowly walked past us, sometimes pausing in between, occasionally catching a ray of sunlight in the process. Slowly the bird disappeared on the other side. We could still hear it calling frequently, however. As Robert kept doing his thing, the bird came back again. This time it hopped through the understory. Again the bird took its time, and now it also started preening. We even managed to make a crappy [movie](#) (the camera only has a three times zoom and the bird is concealed in the vegetation, but it does capture the atmosphere well). When it had left to where it came from again we decided to leave the cuckoo be and needed some time to process this truly amazing experience!

Little Bronze Cuckoo

At DVFC we heard two birds singing along the entrance road and saw another one briefly. Around the football field we observed a splendid female in direct comparison with a pissed off Pied Fantail. The fantail was actually considerably larger!

Hawk-cuckoos

Hawk-cuckoo diversity is considerable on Borneo. Three forms are resident and these are complemented part of the year by an additional three, escaping the northern winter. After some recent taxonomic turbulence, all six taxa are now regarded as species. We heard Moustached Hawk-Cuckoo twice at SK. It did not feel like responding to tape. At DVFC we heard it again along the entrance road and we managed to see it flying past as it checked out the tape. We heard Malaysian Hawk-Cuckoo at PHS in the Tropical Garden and along the trail just past the entrance of the canopy walkway along the trail. We glimpsed the latter one in twilight. We also saw a bird flying past over the football field. Dark Hawk-Cuckoo was vocal at KNP and RIC, but did not feel like showing itself [sounds: [XC36728](#) | [XC36729](#)].

Cuculus cuckoos

A hepatic female seen along SK did not seem to be Indian (and so was likely an Oriental). Our only sighting of Sunda Cuckoo was a flyby hepatic female at KNP, escorted by angry songbirds.

Mountain Scops Owl

A distant bird heard only around the Rock Hostel in KNP.

Mantanani Scops Owl [sounds: [XC36706](#) | [XC36707](#)]

This owl (which, despite its name, has a wider distribution in the Philippines) is present simply around the resort on Pulau Mantanani. At dusk we already saw some silhouettes of flying birds from the beach. At night they were calling vigorously and, although it took some effort, we managed to see a pair very satisfactory at the plantation edge behind the resort.

Buffy Fish Owl

We saw only two individuals during night cruise at SK. Ironically, one of them was actually in KJC and when we got back from our nightly business it was sitting right at the pier! We saw it at only a few meters distance.

Brown Wood-Owl

At KNP, there was a territory at the end of the Silau Silau trail. After some taping, we saw it flying across the Power Station road at dusk.

Nightjars

When we drove back from Gomantong Caves to SK, we flushed a Large-tailed Nightjar from the road. When we got out of the car we could hear it singing. A Malaysian Eared Nightjar was singing at dusk at the suspension bridge at DVFC. When we hiked up to the Bukit Ular trail early morning at KNP, we saw a nightjar passing us very close by along the Power Station road. Unfortunately it happened all kind of fast and it was still quite dark (around 6 AM), so we could not identify it. Grey is the most likely candidate, but Large-tailed has been reported here as well.

Whiskered Treeswift [movie: [Whiskered Treeswift on nest](#)]

How cool is this species?! Our best observation was of a pair nesting near the suspension bridge at DVFC. The nest itself was located on a very thin branch. It was not much more than a small cup, just big enough to hold one egg. When a parent is sitting on it, the nest is not even visible! The birds were hanging around the suspension bridge during our entire stay. They sat on the rail of the bridge often and were very approachable.



The resident Whiskered Treeswift at DVFC's suspension bridge.

Bornean and Glossy Swiftlet

At KNP, all *Collocalia* Swiftlets appeared to be Bornean. However, we did not pay these birds the attention they really deserve and sympatry with Glossy has been suggested on Mount Kinabalu. According to Moyle et al. (2008), Bornean Swiftlet is only known from Mount Kinabalu, but they acknowledge it may well have a wider distribution (and therefore prefer not to name it Kinabalu or Sabah Swiftlet). Indeed, this species also occurs at RIC, where they actually nest right at the Gunung Alab Resort [movie: [Bornean Swiftlet](#)]. Glossy itself can be found practically everywhere else on Borneo.

Nest swiftlets

Aerodromus swiftlets are notoriously difficult to identify in the field. The situation is most complex in Borneo, where three species co-occur: Edible-nest, Black-nest and Mossy-nest Swiftlet. A visit to a cave with breeding swiftlets greatly facilitates identification: find a swiftlet on a nest, et voilà! Gomantong Cave is the place to be.

We saw the relatively scarce Mossy-nest very well. Black-nest Swiftlets hang their nest higher up on the ceiling, but are much more abundant. The Edible-nest's nests had apparently just been harvested, so this, in combination with a rushing Robert (who was afraid we would not be in time for the hunting Bat Hawks) meant we dipped this species. We suggest you try to be here on time, so you can take your time. Not only to tick off the species, but simply to observe these fascinating birds and for the experience of being in such a unique and beautiful place. Nest-swiftlets are regularly encountered practically everywhere and eventually we did manage to identify Edible-nest in the field after all; in coastal areas it appears to be reliable to identify



A (blurry) Mossy-nest Swiftlet at Gomantong.

lighter-rumped 'nest-swiftlets' as Edible-nests. At SK, when checking the swiftlets while they dip down in the river for a drink, the distinction between dark-rumped and light-rumped types is delicate but obvious. More conveniently, Edible-nest Swiftlets at Pulau Mantanani possess such strikingly white rumps that they almost resemble Germain's Swiftlet *A. germani*. In fact these birds have been ascribed to that species in the past! By the way, at BRL and PHS at several instances we encountered swiftlets which came across as 'different' and may have been Giant Swiftlet.

White-throated Needletail

This is quite a rare species on Borneo. We saw one on Mantanani Besar, on a day which was apparently suitable for swift migration, as there were also about ten Fork-tailed Swifts around.

Whitehead's Trogon

Oh goody. We taped in a male taped along the Liwagu trail at KNP, which only showed itself briefly and we glimpsed another bird here. We saw a showy immature male at the start of the summit trail (at the waterfall). Furthermore, we had several encounters along the Bukit Ular trail. A pair was quite vocal at this spot and we could see the birds hawking deep down in the forest. On one occasion, the inquisitive female came watching us for a while as it perched close by. We eventually saw the stunning male very well.

Cinnamon-rumped Trogon

We only heard this species once along the Tembaling Waterfall trail at DVFC (at the crossing where a path splits off toward the Kuala Tembaling trail).

Rufous-collared Kingfisher

We checked the Tropical Garden at PHS, but this turned out to be a very depressing place. There were some birds in way too small cages which were completely stressed out and had feathers and even beaks broken due to continued collision with their cage. We tried to get out of this place as quickly as possible. Our spirits took a u-turn when a weird flash flying from the ground turned out to be a stunning male Rufous-collared Kingfisher, which perched ridiculously close-by and provided us plenty of time to study him. The next day we encountered an equally cooperative and stunning female along the Langanan waterfall trail, just above the bat cave.

Banded Kingfisher

A female provided great views at DVFC along the waterfall trail, violating a big insect, before buzzing off. We also heard this species along the grid at DVFC (W10N2) and at PHS (around the clearing about halfway the Langanan Waterfall trail).

Ruddy Kingfisher

We heard this species both at Sepilok (from the canopy walkway) and at SK (Tenegang tributary) but unfortunately it remained a heard only observation.

Blue-banded Kingfisher

There is a connecting trail between the Tembaling waterfall and Kuala Tembaling trails at DVFC, which crosses a stream (very pronounced). We just sat down here (this was not accidental, we had been pondering on this strategy) and waited for a while. Amazingly, within just ten minutes a female came flying towards the spot and perched for about 15 minutes. Nice!

Red-bearded Bee-eater

We had our only sighting of this species when we drove back from BRL to Lahad Datu. Our sharp driver spotted one from the car by the side of the road. We saw it ridiculously well. An amazing bird.

Helmeted Hornbill

Not a sniff of this species at SK. Heard every day at DVFC, sometimes so tantalizingly close that we could even hear the wings beating above closed canopy. Eventually, on our last morning at DVFC, we saw a pair flying over our heads along the entrance road. The female perched in full view and could be seen calling in the scope, before taking off again. Euphoria! We also heard Helmeteds at BRL.

White-crowned Hornbill

SK has proven to be the most reliable spot on Borneo for this tricky hornbill. On our first afternoon, we saw a male which first crossed main river, disappearing into the forest. Fortunately it then came back and started singing in the top of a tree, giving splendid views! The next morning a probable female was not that showy, but still provided okay views.

Other hornbills

Our best observation of Bushy-crested Hornbill was that of a party which spent the night in a small tree right beside our lodge at KJC [sounds: [XC33067](#) | [XC33068](#) | [XC33069](#)]. Our most memorable Rhinoceros Hornbill experience was that of an extremely approachable pair, joined by a freshly fledged juvenile, gorging themselves in a fig tree at SK [movies: [Rhinoceros Hornbill 1](#) | [Rhinoceros Hornbill 2](#)]. Another interesting observation was that of a dozing bird in the spotlight during a night cruise at SK. We saw plenty of Wrinkled Hornbills as SK, including two large groups (of 14 and 16), and encountered a pair along the entrance road of BRL. Compared to our experience in Kalimantan, we thought Wreathed Hornbill was quite scarce. We only heard one calling in the distance at SK and our only sighting was of a group of three flying by at the BRL entrance road.



Fig-feasting Rhinoceros Hornbill at Sungai Kinabatangan.

Yellow-crowned Barbet

Aarrghh! Heard very commonly at DVFC and also at PHS but no way these little bastards were going to show themselves. Just like in Kalimantan in 2005, we had to settle with a disappointing heard only...

The three endemic barbets

We saw Mountain Barbet twice at RIC, once in the garden of the center (from the road) and once at the large clearing further down the road. We heard a single bird at PHS. We also saw Bornean Barbet twice at RIC, once along the road and once at the 'clearing' [sound: [XC34887](#)]. On the slopes of Mount Kinabalu, a blue-throated form of Bornean Barbet has been described as ssp. *cyanea*. However, black-throated birds have been observed here too. Age-related variation has been coined as an explanation for the differences in plumage and the status of *cyanea* is considered uncertain. We only heard the species here (about five). We did not manage to see Golden-naped Barbet at RIC, but it turned out to be more than cooperative at KNP [sound: [XC36298](#)]. Barbets proved to be quite difficult at RIC in our case, which had most likely to do with the scarcity of fruiting trees. Most birders who visited the spot had experiences to the contrary.

Woodpeckers

A cooperative Olive-backed Woodpecker was seen along the grid at DVFC (just past W16N0). We saw a stunning pair of Orange-backed Woodpeckers very well at KNP along the Mempening trail. Plates do not do this justice to the bright orange plumage of the male. A female of this species showed herself very well at DVFC at the same spot as the Blue-banded Kingfisher. We glimpsed Great Slaty Woodpecker (the largest woodpecker in the world, mind you!) twice along the SK. Furthermore we heard it along the waterfall trail at DVFC. We finally managed to get decent (but still distant) views along the entrance road of DVFC.

Whitehead's Broadbill

After only having heard it once along the Power Station road at KNP (the laughing call), we finally managed to catch up with this jewel along the Bukit Ular trail, and how! We used the area just before the 500m marker as a stake out on our last full day at KNP. We would stay here the entire day if we had to! Eventually, at an open spot in the canopy, something with the correct silhouette flew past and landed in the canopy. As we inched sideways, with our binoculars firmly pressed into our eye sockets, the shape revealed itself as a stunning male Whitehead's Broadbill! It soon started singing. This rattling sound turned out to be quite soft; listening to recordings beforehand had sure given us the wrong impression! Another bird started vocalizing from nearby. As the male flew off, the second bird, a female, came into view. The birds, which turned out to be feeding on some small orange berries at this spot, appeared quite agitated with our presence and their restlessness prevented us from getting prolonged views. Later that morning we bumped into the same pair again, just a bit lower down the trail. They uttered a sound we had not heard before on any recording we had. It sounded like the alarm call of a Eurasian Blackbird cursing at cats, but it also had a woodpecker-like quality (if that makes any sense).

Long-tailed Broadbill

RIC is quite a reliable spot for this species, which is hardly ever observed elsewhere on the beaten birding track on Borneo. We had two birds calling towards each other from opposite sides of the road, just a couple of hundred meters along the road towards Tambunan, at the obvious pull in at the second bend, at the 500 meter marker. What stunning birds!



Long-tailed Broadbill at RIC.

Blue-headed Pitta

We taped in one male at SK, which only showed itself briefly. We encountered several along the Tembaling waterfall trail at DVFC. A female bouncing across the trail was our only other sighting, not including a couple of glimpses. Our experience is probably not so representative as we did not really go for this species, having been spoiled in Kalimantan. Still, this might just be the most beautiful of pittas (despite tough competition!).

Black-crowned Pitta [sound: [XC34687](#)]

One was whistling at SK, simply along the trail behind KJC. It did not feel like showing it self as we mimicked the sound however. We heard several at Danum Valley and managed to see one at both DVFC (grid at W7N0) and BRL (along entrance road).

Painful heard only pittas

The end of the waterfall trail at DVFC is definitely 'pitta territory'. We heard a Giant, several Bandeds and a Blue-banded here. However, they were all frustratingly unresponsive. Giant was also heard at BRL along Hornbill trail (two calling to each other). We also heard Banded Pittas at other spots along the waterfall trail and even along the entrance road of DVFC. One called briefly at PHS, but refused to cooperate. Blue-banded Pitta should also be possible at BRL and of course PHS, but not a sniff of this brilliant endemic. We heard several Hooded Pittas along the river at DVFC and one at the entrance road at BRL.

Maroon-breasted Philentoma

A pair was seen several times along the trail at KJC. The birds were quite aggressive towards us, but showed themselves beautifully in the process. Our only other encounter was of two individual males at PHS.

Bornean Bristlehead

The Rainforest Discovery Centre at Sepilok indeed proved to be a good spot for this fantastic species. We already saw a pack of three on our first late morning trip into the forest. The next day, having just placed a couple of passes into the forest, we heard Bristleheads showing off their amazing vocal capabilities, actually from behind us! We rushed back and it turned out that a party of four was foraging in a big open tree, simply at the parking lot! We spent about a quarter of an hour with them, obtaining amazing views before they decided to call it a day. We heard at least one Bristlehead calling in the distance at SK, while we were focusing on the Bornean Ground Cuckoo. At DVFC, we saw at least two along the grid (just past W10N0) and we either kept encountering new Bristleheads along the entrance road, or we were being stalked by a party of about six. Did we mention this is a fantastic species already? Drawings and even photographs do not do their strawberry-colored heads justice!

Straw-headed Bulbul [sound: [XC33057](#)]

Although the pet industry is taking its toll on the world population of this much wanted songster, Sabah still holds good numbers. We observed them at two locations along SK, one of these just across the river at KJC, where a pair provided splendid views. They are also present along the river at DVFC (and could be heard right from the restaurant), where we observed them near the suspension bridge and at the river overview along the Kuala Tembaling trail.

Scaly-breasted Bulbul

We only managed to catch up with this brilliant bulbul at PHS. A couple came foraging on berries near the football field each day. We also had very nice views from the canopy walkway.

Grey-bellied Bulbul

Our only observation was of a party of three along the waterfall trail at DVFC.

Finsch's Bulbul

Following its distinct call soon resulted in great views from the canopy walkway at BRL.
What a cute bird.

Bornean Stubtail

Frustratingly we had to settle with merely glimpses along summit trail KNP. This is despite the fact that we really tried hard for this species and heard it regularly at all elevations (e.g. the Bukit Ular trail alone held two territories).

Yellow-browed Warbler

This species is supposed to be a vagrant on Borneo. At KNP, we heard it calling near the dumpster close to Timpohon gate (our only sighting), halfway along the Liwagu trail, at the upper region of the Liwagu trail, near the HQ and along the Bukit Ular trail. At least three and maybe even five birds must have been involved. Not so rare after all?

Mountain Leaf Warbler

Two types occur on Mount Kinabalu: a bright morph and a pale-headed morph. The latter is supposedly the commonest. We are not sure which form(s) we saw; there seemed to be some variation, but they were all kind of greyish.

Pygmy Ibon

We were very happy to encounter this tricky and cool endemic. We already saw it on our first afternoon at BRL. A party of at least three was feeding in the slender but tall tree right next to the restaurant. You have a good overview of this tree from the boardwalk to the chalets, just after you leave the restaurant (on the left side of the restaurant, when considering the river side to be the front; it was the tree marked with the red arrow in the picture). As it was already around 5:30 PM and during drowsy weather, light conditions were poor. Luckily they turned out to be present in the same tree the next day around 1:15 PM (when we were going for lunch). Now they were showing great and we even had scope views. They appeared to be really fond of their tree and did not seem to intend to move. Eventually we left them be and went off for lunch! When we returned afterwards the birds had left. Pygmy Ibons are indeed incredibly tiny, especially noticeable when you compare them to e.g. sunbirds (which are no giants either). They were actually clinging to the leaves themselves while foraging. As they can keep hanging around like that for a while, they are easily overlooked. However, their high twinkling does not sound like anything else and was what attracted us to them in the first place. So keep an ear open for this species and check this particular tree regularly during your stay!



'Pygmy Ibon' tree next to Borneo Rainforest Lodge restaurant.

Bornean Wren-Babbler

We heard this species at DVFC, both on the grid and long the Tembaling waterfall trail. We managed to see them twice along the waterfall trail, using tape luring. Although this makes them very restless, they showed great.

Black-throated Wren-Babbler

We heard this species at the waterfall trail at DVFC and along the entrance road at BRL. Unfortunately we were not able to see it, despite repeated taping.

Mountain Wren-Babbler

This is quite a sneaky species and we encountered it only three times at KNP. A party of at least four was keeping up with an otherwise arboreal flock on foot along the Mempoening trail. We were very surprised that one of the birds was actually color banded. We encountered Mountain Wren-Babblers twice along the summit trail: two at the second stream just after the 0.5 km marker and three or four about 200 m after the 3.0 km marker.

Striped Wren-Babbler

We saw this fantastic bird twice at DVFC, a single bird along the Tembaling waterfall trail and a pair on the grid (W7N0). Another pair showed well near the entrance gate of BRL.

Bare-headed Laughingthrush [sounds: [XC36299](#) | [XC36300](#)]

The other two laughingthrushes are impossible to miss, but this one is a bit trickier. We encountered it several times along the Power Station road and additionally heard it along the Mempoening trail.

Everett's Thrush

In order to catch up with this enigmatic sneak, it is pertinent to be on the trails during twilight. This means being on the spot very early in the morning. When we just arrived at KNP, we were told that it was not possible to get a taxi early enough to drop us off at the gate. (People who have stayed outside the park have managed to arrange something with taxies, however.) For a moment we lost all hope on seeing this species. On our first afternoon we did see an intriguing thrush along the highest part of Silau Silau trail, but it was so incredibly misty we were not able to identify it and the bird hopped off the trail quickly. This did not help! However, after having contemplated the dilemma we were in, we came up with a brilliant strategy: get up and start walking very early. This paid off immediately, as on our first morning, having left the Hill Lodge at 5:25 AM, we bumped into this species at the Bukit Ular trail. We could not believe our luck! It kept foraging in front of us from 6:20 until 6:45 AM. On the same afternoon we flushed one along the upper part of Silau Silau trail, which landed for a brief period on the trail. This must have been the same bird as yesterday! The next morning, we saw a fantastic pair foraging along the Power Station road, about 150 meter before the sign-posted 1.5 km marker from about 6:15 to 6:30 AM. The morning hereafter we encountered one at 6:15 AM, again along the Power Station road, but now a bit past the end of Silau Silau trail, just after the sharp turn. That same morning, we saw one extremely well on the Bukit Ular again, but this time near 'large wet spot' where you walk along a fallen tree. This was around 8:05 AM. So, in the end we ended up doing incredibly well with this species. To our surprise it can actually be encountered quite low down already. Furthermore, the late afternoon is also a good period to observe it (and 'luckily' it gets misty and therewith dark quite early), but early morning does seem best.

Fruithunter [movie: [female Fruithunter on nest](#)]

Just when we were finally getting to grips with the Whitehead's Broadbill, an amazing male Fruithunter joined the feast and suddenly popped into view! Imagine our enthusiasm! Adrenaline levels went through the roof! The bird fed on the same small orange berries as the broadbills. His extremely high pitched song revealed its affinities to the cochoas. We managed to see and hear it again a couple of times during the morning. We were shown a nest later that day by one of a whole team of American students who were studying the life history of KNP's birds. We could just see the head of the female when she was sitting on the nest, but when she decided to leave the nest we saw her perched. Beautiful! In the mean time we could hear the male calling towards her.

Orange-headed Thrush

This thrush is much shier than Everett's Thrush and really requires you to try to move as stealthy as possible. We saw it twice along the Bukit Ular trail, once just before the 500 m marker (around 8:50 AM, so quite late already) and on another occasion just before the 'wet spot', a bit more lower down (6:40 AM). We consider ourselves very lucky with these observations, as most people miss it completely.

Wintering passerines

An unexpected bonus was encountering quite some Siberian Blue Robins. At DVFC, we encountered five or six individuals, both on the Tembaling waterfall trail and the grid (mostly adult males but also a second calendar year male and female). A male and a female showed very well along the trail after the canopy walkway of PHS. Pulau Mantanani turned out to be a good spot to encounter migrants, but of course your success rate here depends on the season. We managed to catch up with a couple of Eyebrowed Thrushes on Mantanani Besar. We saw a couple of Olive-backed Pipits along the small road running up towards Gunung Alab substation which starts directly across the road from Gunung Alab Resort. We encountered Oriental Reed Warbler at Tempasuk paddyfields and at Likas Lagoon.

Fulvous-chested Jungle Flycatcher

We saw one well along the Langanan Waterfall trail at PHS. This species is not often recorded here apparently.

Blue Flycatchers

We had several singing Bornean Blue Flycatchers along the Tembaling waterfall trail at DVFC. Sunda Blue Flycatcher was seen once on the grid at DVFC and once at the start of the canopy walkway at BRL. Two Hill Blue Flycatchers were encountered along the Langanan Waterfall trail at PHS.

Forktails

We had brief views of two forktails sp. at RIC in a tiny stream along the road. They were either White-crowned or Bornean, but it is unclear to us which form occurs here. Forktails are stunning birds but are usually quite shy and sneaky. We had several sightings of each species. Especially memorable was a very confiding Chestnut-naped Forktail right at the start of the Tembaling waterfall trail at DVFC.

Pygmy Flycatcher

We encountered this cool bird on the upper regions of the Liwagu trail and along the Power Station road at KNP. We believe to have underestimated it; we did not have a good recording and probably did not manage to pick out its vocalizations, wrongly attributing them to other flycatchers.

Thick-billed Flowerpecker

Note that Thick-billed Flowerpecker is not mentioned to occur on Borneo by MacKinnon & Phillipps (1993). It has since been realized that it actually does. It being a scarce, little brown job makes it easy to miss. We saw one well from the canopy walkway at PHS.

Whitehead's Spiderhunter

We saw one briefly but well atop of a tree along the road at RIC, close to the center itself. We also heard it singing in the distance at KNP at the Hill Lodge.

Sound recordings

Sander made several sound recordings during the trip and placed them online at the online sound database [Xeno-Canto Asia](#). Some recordings have already been linked to directly in the annotated checklist, but not all species recorded have been included in that list. You can use [this real-time query](#) to see all recordings of our Sabah recordings online at Xeno-Canto.

The complete checklist

We have included a complete checklist of the bird species we observed and an overview per site. As the basis for our checklist, we use a complete list of the species recorded on Borneo, according to Smythies & Davison (1999) and Mann (2008). On this complete list, only species identified with certainty are included (i.e. records such as *Buteo* sp. – which you are not going to see anyway – are excluded). Introduced species which have become established are included, but occasional escapes have been left out.

Sequence and nomenclature closely follows Gill & Wright (2006; [version 2.1](#)). It has been adapted to encompass more recent proposals, provided they are scientifically well-founded. We do not claim to have been exhaustive here. We even went progressive and treat some taxa which are still usually considered subspecies as species. Are we qualified to do so? Not a single bit, but hey! In a few cases other regular occurring vernacular names are provided and family names are not strictly followed.

All deviations from Gill & Wright (2006) are elaborated upon in the footnotes (with references provided). Furthermore, we stress that systematics and taxonomy are by default interim decisions and lots of change is expected to occur in the future, especially in Asia. The [Taxonomy in Flux](#) website is a brilliant source to keep up to date with the latest developments in these exiting fields.

Here follows an explanation of the columns used in the complete checklist. Keep in mind that knowledge on status and distribution is not always clear-cut and new insights could be just around the corner.

[IUCN Red List Criteria](#) – Cr = critically endangered, En = endangered, Vu = vulnerable, Dd = data deficient, Nt = near threatened, Lc = least concern, Na = not assessed because species status not (yet) accepted by BirdLife International.

[Distribution](#) – Based on the natural breeding and wintering range (so excluding vagrancy and introductions). B = endemic to the island of Borneo (including offshore satellites), S = endemic to the Sunda region, < = Distributed also further into the Indo-Malayan biogeographic realm and beyond, > = Distributed also in Australasian biogeographic realm, < > = both. Additional information on species endemic to the two biomes occurring on Borneo (based on Chan et al., 2004) provided between parentheses, if applicable: AS14 = Sundaic lowland forest, AS15 = Sundaic montane forest, Na = not assessed because species status not (yet) accepted by BirdLife International.

[Status](#) – R = resident, W = wintering migrant, N = non-breeding visitor, P = passenger migrant, V = vagrant species, I = introduced species (with a population established, so not including incidental escapees), U = present status unknown. Based on MacKinnon & Phillipps (1993), Mann (2008) and Smythies & Davison (1999).

[Total](#) – A complete overview of our observations. A distinction is made between species seen and heard only. x = observed with certainty, ? = species possibly observed, i = introduced species observed.

[Sites](#) – Observations per site have not been divided in seen versus heard only. Abbreviations used: BRL = Borneo Rainforest Lodge; DVFC = Danum Valley Field Centre; KK = Kota Kinabalu; KNP = Kinabalu National Park; SK = Sungai Kinabatangan; PHS = Poring Hot Springs; RIC = Rafflesia Information Centre. x = observed with certainty, ? = species possibly observed, i = introduced species observed.

Threskiornithidae	Ibises and Spoonbills																			
<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	Black-headed Ibis	Nt	<	V																
<i>Pseudibis davisoni</i>	White-shouldered Ibis	Cr	<	R																
<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Glossy Ibis	Lc	<>	V																
<i>Platalea minor</i>	Black-faced Spoonbill	En	<	V																
Ardeidae	Hérons and Bitterns																			
<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	Great Bittern	Lc	<	V																
<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	Yellow Bittern	Lc	<>	W	x								x	x						
<i>Ixobrychus eurhythmus</i>	Von Schrenk's Bittern	Lc	<>	W																
<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	Cinnamon Bittern	Lc	<>	R	x									x						
<i>Dupetor flavicollis</i>	Black Bittern	Lc	<>	N																
<i>Gorsachius goisagi</i>	Japanese Night Heron	En	<>	V																
<i>Gorsachius melanolophus</i>	Malayan Night Heron	Lc	<	W	x								x							
<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Black-crowned Night Heron	Lc	<>	R W	x			x						x						
<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	Rufous Night Heron	Lc	<>	R	x			x						x						
<i>Butorides striata</i>	Striated Heron	Lc	<>	R	x									x	x					
<i>Ardeola bacchus</i>	Chinese Pond Heron	Lc	<	W						?										
<i>Ardeola speciosa</i>	Javan Pond Heron	Lc	<>	R	x					?					x					
<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	Eastern Cattle Egret	Lc	<>	W	x									x	x				x	
<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Grey Heron	Lc	<	W	x									x						
<i>Ardea sumatrana</i>	Great-billed Heron	Lc	<>	R																
<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	Purple Heron	Lc	<>	R	x			x						x	x					
<i>Ardea modesta</i>	Eastern Great Egret	Lc	<>	R W	x			x						x	x					
<i>Egretta intermedia</i>	Intermediate Egret	Lc	<>	R W	x			x						x	x					
<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Little Egret	Lc	<>	R W	x			x						x	x					x
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Pacific Reef Heron	Lc	<>	R	x									x						x
<i>Egretta eulophotes</i>	Chinese Egret	Vu	<	W	x									x						
Fregatidae	Frigatebirds																			
<i>Fregata andrewsi</i>	Christmas Frigatebird	Cr	<>	N	x															x
<i>Fregata minor</i>	Great Frigatebird	Lc	<>	N	x															x
<i>Fregata ariel</i>	Lesser Frigatebird	Lc	<>	N	x															x
Sulidae	Gannets and Boobies																			
<i>Sula dactylatra</i>	Masked Booby	Lc	<>	V R																
<i>Sula sula</i>	Red-footed Booby	Lc	<>	V R																
<i>Sula leucogaster</i>	Brown Booby	Lc	<>	N																
Phalacrocoracidae	Cormorants																			
<i>Microcarbo melanoleucos</i>	Little Pied Cormorant	Lc	>	V																
<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	Little Cormorant	Lc	<	U																
<i>Phalacrocorax sulcirostris</i>	Little Black Cormorant	Lc	>	U																
<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	Great Cormorant	Lc	<>	N R																
Anhingidae	Anhingas																			
<i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	Oriental Darter	Nt	<>	R	x			x						x						
Pandionidae	Ospreys																			
<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Western Osprey	Lc	<	R W	x									x	x					
Accipitridae	Kites, Hawks and Eagles																			
<i>Aviceda jerdoni</i>	Jerdon's Baza	Lc	<>	R	x									x						
<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Crested Honey-Buzzard	Lc	<>	R W	x			x						x	x					
<i>Macheiramphus alcinus</i>	Bat Hawk	Lc	<>	R	x								x							
<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Black-winged Kite	Lc	<>	R	x															x
<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Black Kite	Lc	<>	V																
<i>Haliastur indus</i>	Brahminy Kite	Lc	<>	R	x			x	x	x				x	x					
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	White-bellied Sea Eagle	Lc	<>	R	x			x						x						x

<i>Alophoixus ochraceus</i>	Ochraceous Bulbul	Lc	< (AS14)	R	x					x	x				x	x		
<i>Alophoixus bres</i>	Grey-cheeked Bulbul	Lc	S (AS14)	R	x					x	x						x	
<i>Alophoixus phaeocephalus</i>	Yellow-bellied Bulbul	Lc	S (AS14)	R	x				x		x						x	
<i>Setornis criniger</i>	Hook-billed Bulbul	Vu	S (AS14)	R														
<i>Tricholestes criniger</i>	Hairy-backed Bulbul	Lc	S (AS14)	R	x						x	x					x	
<i>Iole olivacea</i>	Buff-vented Bulbul	Nt	S (AS14)	R	x		x	x	x	x	x						x	
<i>Ixos malaccensis</i>	Streaked Bulbul	Nt	S (AS14)	R	x												x	
<i>Hemixos cinereus</i>	Cinereous Bulbul	Na	S (Na)	R	x											x		
Hirundinidae	Swallows																	
<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Sand Martin	Lc	<	W														
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	Lc	<>	W	x			x								x		x
<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	Pacific Swallow	Lc	<>	R	x		x	x		x	x	x			x		x	x
<i>Delichon dasypus</i>	Asian House Martin	Lc	<	W														
<i>Cecropis daurica</i>	Red-rumped Swallow	Lc	<	W														
<i>Cecropis striolata</i>	Striated Swallow	Lc	<>	W? R?														
Cettidae	Cettia bush warblers and allies																	
<i>Urosphena whiteheadi</i>	Bornean Stubtail	Lc	B (AS15)	R	x											x		
<i>Cettia vulcania</i>	Sunda Bush Warbler	Lc	>	R	x										x	x		
<i>Abroscoptes superciliosus</i>	Yellow-bellied Warbler	Lc	<	R	x												x	
<i>Phyllergates cucullatus</i>	Mountain Tailorbird	Lc	<>	R	x										x	x		
Phylloscopidae	Leaf warblers and allies																	
<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>	Yellow-browed Warbler	Lc	<	W	x											x		
<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	Arctic Warbler	Lc	<>	W	x												x	
<i>Phylloscopus trivirgatus</i>	Mountain Leaf Warbler	Lc	<>	R	x											x		
<i>Seicercus montis</i>	Yellow-breasted Warbler	Lc	>	R	x										x	x		
Acrocephalidae	Reed warblers and allies																	
<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>	Oriental Reed Warbler	Lc	<>	W	x							x	x					
<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	Clamorous Reed Warbler	Lc	<>	R														
Megaluridae	Grassbirds and allies																	
<i>Megalurus palustris</i>	Striated Grassbird	Lc	<	R	x										x			
<i>Bradypterus accentor</i>	Friendly Bush Warbler	Lc	B (AS15)	R														
<i>Locustella lanceolata</i>	Lanceolated Warbler	Lc	<	P? W?														
<i>Locustella certhiola</i>	Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler	Lc	<>	P W														
<i>Locustella ochotensis</i>	Middendorff's Warbler	Lc	<>	P W														
Cisticolidae	Cisticolas and allies																	
<i>Cisticola exilis</i>	Golden-headed Cisticola	Lc	<>	R														
<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>	Yellow-bellied Prinia	Lc	<	R	x		x	x		x	x							
<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>	Dark-necked Tailorbird	Lc	<	R	x			x			x							
<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>	Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	Lc	S	R	x		x	x		x	x						x	
<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>	Ashy Tailorbird	Lc	S	R	x		x	x		x	x	x			x		x	
Zosteropidae	White-eyes																	33
<i>Staphida everetti</i>	Chestnut-crested Yuhina	Lc	B (AS15)	R	x										x	x	x	34
<i>Oculocincta squamifrons</i>	Pygmy Ibon	Lc	B (AS15)	R	x						x							
<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	Oriental White-eye	Lc	<>	R														35
<i>Zosterops emiliae</i>	Mountain Blackeye	Lc	B (AS15)	R	x											x		36
<i>Zosterops atricapilla</i>	Black-capped White-eye	Lc	S (AS15)	R	x										x	x		
<i>Zosterops everetti</i>	Everett's White-eye	Lc	<>	R	x					x							x	
<i>Zosterops flavus</i>	Javan White-eye	Nt	S	R														
<i>Zosterops chloris</i>	Lemon-bellied White-eye	Lc	>	R														
Timaliidae	Babblers, Tit-Babblers and Scimitar-Babblers																	33
<i>Stachyridopsis rufifrons</i>	Rufous-fronted Babbler	Lc	<	R	x					x							x	37
<i>Macronus bornensis</i>	Bold-striped Tit-Babbler	Lc	S (Na)	R	x		x	x		x	x						x	

Footnotes

1. A.k.a. Blue-breasted Quail.
2. The Bornean ssp. *pyronota* is quite distinct from the rest of the population (Sumatra and Malayan Peninsula).
3. We accept the Bornean population (also including ssp. *nobilis*) as specifically distinct from the rest of the population (Sumatra and Malayan Peninsula). The Bornean population shows striking morphological differences from the rest of the range (Madge & McGowan, 2002).
4. A.k.a. Changeable Hawk-Eagle.
5. 'Purple Swampen' is paraphyletic (Trewick, 1997). To circumvent this, it has been proposed to raise several populations to species level (Sangster, 1998). The form occurring on Borneo is called Black-backed Swampen *Porphyrio viridis* (also including ssp. *indicus*).
6. Although often all members of Stercorariidae are called skua, sometimes the smaller, more marked species are designated as jaegers. We choose not to make the distinction, thus circumventing having to deal with the unclear affinities of Pomarine Skua.
7. Mann (2008) mentions that it is not certain that all populations of Zebra Dove are exotic.
8. Mann (2008) mentions that possibly all Bornean populations of Blue-naped Parrot derive from introductions (instead of only those on the mainland).
9. Mann (2008) suggests Red-breasted Parakeet is possibly introduced from Java.
10. 'Gould's Bronze-cuckoo *C. russatus*', mentioned in MacKinnon & Phillipps (1993), is not recognized as a distinct species.
11. Brown Wood Owls of the mountain race *vaga* have a distinct call from lowland birds. They produce a single, drawn-out and explosive 'hoo', which actually resembles Bartel's Wood-Owl *Strix bartelsi* (Rob Hutchinson, in litt.). Now, should this be reflected by taxonomy?
12. Non-Javan Javan Frogmouths are sometimes treated as a different species: Blyth's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus affinis* (cf. [BirdLife International](#)).
13. Moyle et al. (2008) have elevated the taxon *dodgei*, formerly considered a race of Cave Swiftlet *C. linchi*, to species level, based on analysis of mitochondrial DNA sequence data. Cave Swiftlet is found on Sumatra, Java (and satellite islands), Bali and Lombok and can be distinguished further by its larger size. Bornean Swiftlet has green-tinged upperparts, whereas in Glossy these have a purplish/bluish gloss. The belly of Bornean is white, whereas it is pale grey in Glossy. Other features even trickier to establish in the field are a smaller size and lack of whitish tail spots. Furthermore, the hind toes of Bornean Swiftlet lack the feather tuft found in Glossy.
14. MacKinnon & Phillipps (1993) consider the nominate and ssp. *rufidorsa* of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher, both occurring on Borneo, to comprise two species: Black-backed and Rufous-backed Kingfisher. As there is a wide zone of intergradation between the two forms on Borneo, they are predominantly considered as conspecific.
15. The Bornean ssp. *tertius* differs from the rest of the population (Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia) by its orange throat.
16. There have been quite some studies published lately, focusing on Woodpeckers. Gill & Wright (2006) have not dealt with this yet, so we follow the [Taxonomy in Flux website](#).
17. Weibel & Moore (2002a, 2002b) showed these species should be placed in a genus of their own. The name *Yungipicus* is available for this clade.
18. Benz et al. (2006) showed that this species does not belong with the New World *Celeus*.
19. Fuchs et al. (2008) showed the traditional *Picus* to be polyphyletic.

20. The traditional family Eurylaimidae has been found to be not monophyletic (e.g. Irestedt et al., 2006). We follow the suggestion by Irestedt et al. (2006) to resurrect the family Calyptomenidae and narrow Eurylaimidae. Gill & Wright (2006) instead lump the Asities (Philepittidae) and *Sapayoa* in Eurylaimidae. All these different groups are undoubtedly ancient and furthermore highly distinct. To us their lumping comes across as a weird treatment to say the least.
21. The traditional *Pitta* is split up in several genera based on Irestedt et al. (2006).
22. The Bornean ssp. *schwaneri* of Banded Pitta differs from the Javan nominate in having a bluish-purplish centre of the belly, while lacking a similarly collared breast-band (Lambert & Woodcock, 1996). These ssp. *irena*, from Sumatra and the Asian mainland is very different from both of them. Perhaps the time is ripe for some taxonomical updating?
23. The sequence of this species in Gill & Wright (2006) is incorrect (e.g. Irestedt et al., 2006; Lambert & Woodcock, 1996).
24. Tephrodornithidae, as followed by Gill & Wright (2006), is good as an interim decision (although should the not be an i before 'dae?'), but taxonomical dust has not quite settled yet, as the family is not monophyletic (Moyle et al., 2006; Fuchs et al., 2007). *Philentoma* is not the closest relative of the monophyletic group of *Hemipus* and *Tephrodornis*.
25. The sequence of this family is slightly different from the sequence in Gill & Wright (2006) based on Moyle et al. (2006) and Fuchs et al. (2007).
26. This species is not a jay at all, but shows affinities with shrikes (Laniidae) (Jönsson et al., 2008).
27. The Bornean ssp. *coronatus* is quite distinct from the nominate (which occurs in the rest of the Sunda region).
28. The Bornean ssp. *stigmatops* differs from the rest of the population (from the rest of the Sunda region and mainland Asia) by having a whitish patch around the eye.
29. We accept the Bornean population as specifically distinct from the rest of the population (Sumatra and Malay Peninsula).
30. Bulbul systematics are still a bit of a mess. For Bornean species applies that *Pycnonotus* is not monophyletic (Moyle & Marks, 2006). Further study is required.
31. Mann (2008) does not exclude the possibility of natural colonization by Sooty-headed Bulbul.
32. We accept Pale-faced Bulbul as specifically distinct from Flavescent Bulbul *Pycnonotus flavescens*.
33. The traditional family Timaliidae composed an artificial grouping: a taxonomical 'waste-basket'. Some species have been found to be something totally different, whereas others were wrongfully placed in other families. White-eyes turned out to be actually embedded in this group (Cibois, 2003a), whereas White-bellied Erpornis and shrike-babblers have been revealed as belonging in the Vireonidae (e.g. Reddy & Cracraft, 2007)! To make matters worse, the *Sylvia* warblers, the type genus of that other former mess of a family Sylviidae, actually clustered inside the babblers (Cibois, 2003b)! We closely follow a recent publication by Gelang et al. (2009) – so recent that Gill & Wright (2006) have not dealt with it yet – with the exception that we recognize their proposed subfamilies as families. The advantage of this treatment is that it underlines the uniqueness of distinct groups and that the Zosteropidae (white-eyes) keep their family status. Furthermore, we have updated genera according to Collar & Robson (2007). The [Taxonomy in Flux website](#) provides a useful overview of babbler matters. More details where they apply.
34. The yuhinas are basal in the Zosteropidae (e.g. Moyle et al., 2009). The group is not monophyletic. Placement in *Staphina* follows Collar & Robson (2007).

35. Oriental White-eye comprises several species (Moyle et al., 2009). Taxonomy still needs to be sorted out.
36. Mountain Black-eye, formerly placed in monotypic genus *Chlorocharis*, belongs in *Zosterops* (Moyle et al., 2009).
37. Placement in *Stachyridopsis* follows Collar & Robson (2007).
38. Placement in *Turdinus* follows Collar & Robson (2007).
39. Placement in *Ophrydornis* follows Collar & Robson (2007).
40. Generic limits are based on Collar & Robson (2007), but interpreted in the light of Luo et al. (2009).
41. Being almost as messy as the Timaliidae, the families Turdidae and Muscicapidae need to be officially revised urgently. Some genera have been moved from the former to the latter based on Voelker & Spellman (2004). Furthermore the sequence of genera is updated from Gill & Wright (2006). More details provided where they apply.
42. Mann (2008) recognizes a single vagrant as White's Thrush *Zoothera aurea*. This same individual is noted in Smythies & Davison (1999) as Scaly Thrush *Z. dauma*. We go with the most up to date work. Collar (2004) actually disputes these two to be specifically distinct. Lumping would make things easier.
43. Several species formerly placed in *Zoothera* have now been placed in *Geokichla* based on Voelker & Outlaw (2008).
44. The specific status of White-crowned Shama has been disputed Collar (2004), as it intergrades with White-rumped Shama. As the width of the hybrid zone seems to be limited, we keep it as a species.
45. Some authors recognize ssp. *williamsoni* together with the resident ssp. *umbrosa* as a distinct species 'Brown-streaked Flycatcher' (Inskipp et al., 1996).
46. *Brachypteryx* belongs in Muscicapidae, not Turdidae (Voelker & Spellman, 2004).
47. *Myophonus* belongs in Muscicapidae, not Turdidae (Voelker & Spellman, 2004).
48. A.k.a. Large-billed Blue Flycatcher.
49. Although the placement of this species in the genus *Cyornis* is likely incorrect anyway, as long as it is, we prefer 'Blue Flycatcher' to be included in the vernacular name. Gill & Wright (2006) use 'White-tailed Flycatcher' for this taxon and reserve the often applied name 'White-tailed Blue Flycatcher' for an African taxon. As the Bornean subspecies does not possess white markings in the tail anyway, we strongly prefer the often used synonym Dark Blue Flycatcher.
50. The upland Bornean Forktail differs from the lowland White-crowned Forktail on morphological (e.g. Davison, 1999) and genetic grounds (Moyle et al., 2005). The tail of Bornean averages longer and the white tips on the inner secondaries average narrower and straighter than White-crowned. Individual, age and sex related variation cloud the picture. The general retiring habits of these birds only further hamper identification in the field (if this is possible at all). Considering altitude in ID helps: birds in Kinabalu National Park are Bornean.
51. The species actually belongs in the genus *Ficedula* (Outlaw & Voelker, 2006). Note there also is a *F. hodgsonii* (double i): Slaty-backed Flycatcher.
52. The traditional *Luscinia* is not monophyletic (Seki, 2006). In order to counter this, the old name *Larvivora* has been resurrected following the [Taxomy in Flux website](#).
53. Sequence updated from Gill & Wright (2006) as fairy bluebirds should be placed close to the leafbirds (e.g. Jønsson & Fjeldså, 2006).
54. Contrary to MacKinnon & Phillipps (1993), Thick-billed Flowerpecker does occur on Borneo.
55. Based on Nyári et al. (in press), several flowerpeckers formerly in *Dicaeum* are placed in *Pachyglossa*.

56. The taxonomy of Grey-breasted *modesta*, Streaky-breasted *affinis* and Bornean *everetti* Spiderhunters seems a disaster and needs to be sorted out. The general opinion, after a paper by Davison (1999), is that Bornean mountain *everetti* is race of the Javan *affinis*, whereas the lowland *modesta* occurs in the Bornean lowlands. However, Haines (2007) suggests that in Sabah probably only one species is present: lowland and mountain birds from Sabah are not genetically distinct. According to Haines (2007), this is supported by an unpublished morphometric study by Robert Moyle. Another question is whether Sabahan spiderhunters would be identical to those from the rest of Borneo.
57. Although previously presumed to be introduced, Scaly-breasted Munia is now sometimes considered to be native (Mann, 2008)

References

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Checklist mammals, reptiles and amphibians

We provide (horribly incomplete) checklists of the mammals, reptiles and amphibians we were able to identify with our limited knowledge.

Mammals

- Mountain Treeshrew *Tupaia montana* – KNP.
- Smooth-tailed Treeshrew *Dendrogale melanura* – KNP.
- Large Flying Fox *Pteropus vampyrus* – Sungai Kinabatangan: couple during night trip and plenty when we stopped for Large-tailed Nightjar on way back from Gomantong Caves.
- Island Flying Fox *Pteropus hypomelanus* – Pulau Mantanani: active at night at resort and also seen during daylight in the coconut plantation behind the resort
- Bats spp. – Gomantong Caves: lots of them (duh). We saw bats regularly at all spots, but do not ask us which species they belonged to.
- Maroon Langur *Presbytis rubicunda* – BRL: twice.
- Hose's Langur *Presbytis hosei* – Sungai Kinabatangan: seen well along the Tenegang tributary.
- Proboscis Monkey *Nasalis larvatus* – Sungai Kinabatangan: seen regularly, especially in the afternoon, when they come to the river's edge to sunbathe.
- Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis* – Sungai Kinabatangan, DVFC, PHS: regular. Also on Pulau Mantanani; a renegade pet?
- Pig-tailed Macaque *Macaca nemestrina* – Sepilok, DVFC.
- Bornean Gibbon *Hylobates muelleri* – Sepilok (heard), Sungai Kinabatangan (heard and our only one seen), PHS (heard) and probably on other places, but we forgot.
- Bornean Orangutan *Pongo pygmaeus* – At SK, we had six sightings of seven individuals: twice we saw small individuals in the camp, we saw three reasonably large males along the main river, and we encountered a mother with baby. At DVFC, a big male was building nest at suspension bridge in camp area on our first evening.
- Giant Squirrel *Ratufa affinis* – PHS: seen from canopy walkway, also heard at this site (and probably at other sites to, but we forgot).
- Kinabalu Squirrel *Callosciurus baluensis* – KNP.
- Prevost's Squirrel *Callosciurus prevostii* – Sepilok, Sungai Kinabatangan.
- 'Plate 25-like squirrels' (see Payne et al., 1998) – E.g. KNP in dumpster near Timpohon Gate. We were not able to identify these to species level with certainty.
- Horse-tailed Squirrel *Sundasciurus hippurus* – DVFC: tried to steal food from the dining area.
- Jentink's Squirrel *Sundasciurus jentinki* – KNP: along summit trail.
- Bornean Mountain Ground Squirrel *Dremomys everetti* – KNP: at Timpohon Gate platform and at nearby dumpster.



Female Proboscis Monkey.



Camera-shy Orangutan at Sungai Kinabatangan.

- Whitehead's Pygmy Squirrel *Exilisciurus whiteheadi* – RIC; KNP: along Bukit Ular Trail
- Plain Pygmy Squirrel *Exilisciurus exilis* – Sungai Kinabatangan; BRL; on boardwalk near lodge.
- Large species of flying squirrel – DVFC: during night drive.
- Rat sp. – KK (waterfront).
- Malay Weasel *Mustela nudipes* – KNP: along Bukit Ular Trail, tried to cross the trail but ran into the vegetation again. After we made some squeaky sounds it briefly came back to take a peak (while snoring and grunting in the process).
- Malay Civet *Viverra zibetha* – Sungai Kinabatangan: tame one called Tom in camp, one along river during night boat trip, one crossing road through oil palm plantation while traveling to Lahad Datu.
- Small-toothed Palm Civet *Arctogalidia trivirgata* – DVFC: during night drive seen very well, almost marsupial-like.
- Leopard Cat *Felis bengalensis* – DVFC: during night drive, was sitting very close to the road and did not seem to mind the presence of a truckload of people, seen very well
- Bornean Pygmy Elephant *Elephas borneensis* – we came across a lot of dung in Danum Valley, but not the real deal
- Bearded Pig *Sus barbatus* – Sungai Kinabatangan: one around the canteen; DVFC: one at the campsite together with a group of Crested Firebacks, one along entrance road
- Lesser Mouse Deer *Tragulus javanicus* – BRL: one foraging around the lodge one evening and (maybe the same individual) the following morning
- Bornean Red Muntjac *Muntiacus muntjac* – DVFC: presumably this species (i.e. not the other one) seen well on the grid
- Sambar Deer *Cervus unicolor* – DVFC: a large herd seen on the football field during a night drive.

Reptiles

- Elegant Bronzeback *Dendrelaphis formosus* –Sungai Kinabatangan; swimming across Tenegang Tributary.
- Striped Bronzeback *Dendrelaphis caudolineatus* – BRL: likely this species, seen from boardwalk along chalets.
- Red-bellied Keelback Snake *Rhabdophis conspicillata* – DVFC; twice in leaf litter along Tembaling Waterfall trail.
- Checker-bellied Water Snake *Amphiesma sarawacense* – KNP: in leaf litter next to Liwagu river along Liwagu Trail.
- Dead snake – KNP: a squashed individual along Power Station road was not identifiable anymore.
- Green Crested Lizard *Bronchocela cristatella* – DVFC and Pulau Mantanani.
- *Draco* sp. – Sungai Kinabatangan, DVFC, PHS.
- Large lizard *Gonocephalus* / *Phoxophrys* sp. – PHS: Tropical Garden.
- Tokeh Gecko *Gekko gekko* –Sungai Kinabatangan (one calling at KJC).
- Smith's Giant Gecko *Gekko smithii* – Sungai Kinabatangan; in our room at KJC.
- Parachuting Gecko *Ptychozoon horsfieldii* – Sungai Kinabatangan.
- Plenty of other geckos – everywhere.



Smith's Giant Gecko behind one of our beds at KJC.

- Kinabalu Litter Skink *Sphenomorphus kinabaluensis* – KNP: in our lodge.
- Striped Bornean Tree Skink *Apterygodon vittatum* – Kinabatangan Jungle Camp
- Plenty of other skinks.
- Water Monitor *Varanus salvator* – Sungai Kinabatangan, DVFC, Pulau Mantanani, KK.
- Saltwater Crocodile *Crocodylus porosus* – Sungai Kinabatangan: several.



Kinabalu Litter Skink inside Hill Lodge, Kinabalu National Park.



A “small” Saltwater Crocodile on the banks of the mighty Sungai Kinabatangan.

Amphibians

- Rock Skipper *Staurois latopalmaris* – DVFC: at Tembaling waterfall pools.
- Plenty of other frogs seen and especially heard, but not identified.