### Malaysia – 17 August – 18 September 2015

As part of my final year of undergraduate study, I had a field course in Borneo. Not wanting to spurn such a fantastic opportunity, I invited dad along with me to go traveling beforehand – with the aim of seeing as many cool creatures as we could before I went to my course, and dad back to proper work. While we are primarily interested in mammals, we also bird when the mammals are asleep, and look at insects and plants when the birds shut up. Therefore, this trip report will mention all mammal sightings and also some of the other natural history things we found cool. Despite our visit coinciding with El Nino (meaning there was unusually dry weather in many places) and with a "supermoon", we were lucky enough to see a great deal.

# Equipment

For mammal identification we used Payne & Francis' Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo and Francis' Field Guide to the Mammals of South-east Asia. For seeing things at night we used Clulite and Waypoint spotlights, as well as a lightweight, but relatively dim LED Lenser hand-held torch. The Clulite obviously gives a very nice yellowish beam, but unfortunately we are onto our second battery and once again it is dying – the charge only lasts for 45 minutes – and I doubt that we will buy another! The Waypoint is much brighter, with a white beam and nearly 5 hours of charge even on its brightest setting – but in closed-canopy spotlighting the beam is sometimes too bright. I also was able to use a rechargeable LED Lenser head torch for a couple of short night walks, which was absolutely fantastic: definitely bright enough, with a beam that can be focused, variable voltage, and most importantly a charge that seemed to last forever (I didn't have to charge it up at all!). I am going to invest in one – it's just a question of whether I buy the £60 or £100 option.

#### The itinerary

Our time was split between a week in Peninsular Malaysia (Taman Negara, and Fraser's Hill) and then two weeks pottering around Sabah (Deramakot, Sukau, Danum, Tabin and Mt Kinabalu), before I went to my field course (back at Danum) and dad went home.

### Taman Negara – 18-22 August

We arrived in KL early on 18 August and picked up a hire car booked through rentalcars.com, who use Hawk on the ground – both seemed to be good. We also picked up our friend who was doing his once-every-three-year in-law visit, and we headed to Taman Negara via one of his family get-togethers – which came with great food and lots of photos (it being Malaysia...). Driving seemed fine, and despite repeated warnings from locals on how it was really very dangerous to venture more than 10km from KL there seemed little reason for worry. We used an app called Waze to navigate and it worked brilliantly. En route we had **long-tailed macaque** and **southern pig-tailed macaque**.

We arrived late-ish to Taman Negara – at about 1730 – and so only had time to go on a night walk around the boardwalks behind the Mutiara resort, rather than go straight to a hide as we had hoped. The night walk was fun, with some good insects, spiders and scorpions and a nice tree snake.

The next morning we went as early as we could to Park HQ (on the Mutiara side of the river) to book our nights in the hide. It only opened at 8, and so with half an hour wait, we pottered round the boardwalk. This proved remarkably successful with grey bellied squirrel, cream-coloured giant squirrel, plantain squirrel, slender squirrel, long-tailed macaque, a tame great argus pheasant, and, most excitingly, a lesser chevrotain. On another morning dad also managed to see a common treeshrew. We also heard white-handed gibbon, as we would every morning, and yet never managed to catch up with them. I think the trick would be to walk up Bukit Teresek early on a clear morning – the gibbons only call later and for a much shorter time when it is misty. It is worth noting that if you ask nicely the water taxi can be persuaded to cross the river early (we asked Dino, who works for HAN Rainforest Resort to arrange it, and it still cost just 1 ringgit per person).

Booking the hides was straightforward and much more organised than I was expecting. Unfortunately Kumbang hide was fully booked for the night of the 19 August and so we took Tabing hide that night, and Kumbang for our remaining two nights. The night Kumbang was fully booked it seemed to be by just one individual: maybe it would be good to have some kind of system whereby keen people could somehow let it be known other keen quiet naturalists would be welcome to join? At about 1600 we headed off to **Tabing hide**, and arrived there at about 1900 (as it was getting dark) having walked slowly, looking for things but managing to find only tapir footprints. The footpath signs seemed to have been badly damaged - probably by the recent floods - but despite that the path was easy enough. Once at the hide we settled down and put out a bit of bait – biscuits for rats and rotting fruit for civets. The night got off to a good start as, at 1930, a red giant flying squirrel landed on a tree about 15m from the hide before moving on. Not long afterwards a Malay civet crossed below the hide and I had a grey tree rat (seemingly pretty large – but obviously arboreal) both behind and in front of the hide. A medium-small brown bat also perched in the hide, and larger, grey looking bats flew outside - we would see the latter again from Kumbang hide, but couldn't ID either. Then the rain started, and it didn't stop! At 6 in the morning there was a wild boar which wandered about for a bit and that was that. On the walk out we saw white-thighed langur and more wild boar, and spooked a couple of red muntjac.

After sleeping for most of the rest of 20 August we headed back out, this time to **Kumbang hide**. We left at about 1630, taking a boat to Kuala Terenggan, and then walking 3km through the forest. We shared the hide with a young French couple, who were kind and kept very quiet when we explained what we were doing. Rather nicely, the woman was also very interested and stayed up til nearly midnight (well after we had started our shift rotations!). The night was also remarkably quiet in terms of mammals. We had **dark-tailed niviventer** around the hut, but no sign of any other mammal until about 0615 in the morning — when dad woke me up by pointing out a **tapir**. (It's up there with the most special ways to be woken up!) Our friend and the French woman also awoke in time to see it. The large bull stood by the waterhole for roughly 10 seconds before clambering slowly up the slope behind and disappearing. I suspect that the spotlight we used actually put him off a little: we saw him after the longest gap between successive spotlight scans (of about 15 minutes, instead of our usual 8 minutes or so).

We left the hide at about 0730, but not before seeing a **Sunda black-banded squirrel** climb up a tall tree directly in front of the hide. After spending most of the day catching up on sleep we walked on the boardwalk to **Tahan hide** (near Mutiara resort) where there we several **wild boar** (9 adults, and at least 6 young). We cancelled our last night in **Kumbang hide** and instead went on a night drive, again organised by **Dino** from the HAN resort. Mammal activity was relatively limited in the oilpalm plantation where they take you, though we did see a **common palm civet** and **barn** and **short-eared owls,** and had a good view of a **reticulated python**. On the way home we also saw a

**Sunda slow loris** on the phone wire to the left of the road. **Dino** said that loris sightings were rare, but that was the second in two days, with other sightings being in the same place, according to the guides.

The next morning we went out with a guide organised by **Dino**, in search of the gibbons. He suggested looking in a patch of forest near his home but outside the National Park. Ultimately a combination of his inexperience, a lack of access to the path and a misty morning contributed to a very unsuccessful trip – we only heard them three or four times.

# Fraser's Hill – 22-23 August

After breakfast we drove to **Fraser's Hill** in search of **siamang.** We stayed at the Shahzan Inn which was pleasant enough, and contacted **Duray** (who was known by the staff at the Shahzan) to ask to guide us. He wasn't in town, but did give us good advice on where to look – **Telekom loop**, **Waterfall Road** and the **New Road**.

In the afternoon we tried scouting out a few potential lookouts, as well as just trying to find whatever was around. On **Lady Maxwell road**, by the start of the **Bishop's Trail**, we saw **grey-bellied squirrel** and **western striped squirrel**. On the path itself we had **red -cheeked squirrel**. That evening we spent quite a while spotlighting, and managed to find a **Thai Peninsula pit viper** on **Waterfall Road**, as well as having two very good views of **spotted giant flying squirrel** along **Telekom Loop**.

The next morning was less successful – we heard **siamang** but only very distantly. I think in part the mist once again didn't help our gibbon search, but it may also be that siamang are becoming harder to find here. We did, however, see **Pallas' squirrel** and also **white-thighed langurs**, and on the drive off the mountain, 3km from the bottom of **New Road** we found a group of **dusky langurs**. **Long-tailed** and **southern pig-tailed macaques** were also common. We then headed to KL to drop off the car, say goodbye to our friend, spend the night and then fly on to Sandakan to begin exploring Borneo.

# Deramakot - 24-27 August

We arrived in Sabah early-ish on the 24 August, and met up with a driver who worked with a colleague of dad's. He turned out to also have great eyes, ears and knowledge about the wildlife, not to mention knowing all the best restaurants on the way. We headed straight for **Deramakot Forest Reserve**. While the drive was uneventful enough (save for a nice brunch just outside Sandakan) it was sad to see the much greater extent of oil palm here than on the Peninsula.

We spent the following three days at Deramakot going out early in the morning and spotlighting in the evening. Despite the near-full moon and the dry weather spotlighting was quite good, with a blood python on the road, small-toothed palm civet, common palm civet, binturong, Malay civet, red giant flying squirrel, Thomas' flying squirrel, black giant flying squirrel, Asian elephant, sambar, leopard cat and large flying fox. We also saw a Bornean slow loris behind the accommodation after one spotlighting trip (at about 2300). The first early morning drive produced only a single leopard cat. The following day we instead went for a walk, and saw a long-footed treeshrew cross the path. There was also a Prevost's squirrel in camp, which was busy mobbing a crested serpent-eagle. On the last morning we went for a drive towards the river, apparently a good road to look for sun bear. Though we didn't see those, we walked a little way along the trail on the

right hand side of the road just out of camp and finally saw our first gibbons of the trip: a pair of calling **Bornean gibbons.** Further along the road there was a **bearded pig**.

During the days themselves we walked near camp – seeing a **flying lizard** and a **giant squirrel** (the same species as the cream-coloured giant on the mainland); and took a late afternoon boat trip on the Kinabatangan river, where we saw a group of **proboscis monkeys** as well as several groups of **long-tailed macaque**.

#### Sukau – 27-29 August

We left Deramakot after lunch on 27 August and headed for Sukau and the Kinabatangan river. We stayed at **Greenview Lodge**, which was clean and friendly, and where a very good bird guide called **Sugiman** doubles as **flat-headed cat** finder in chief. We arrived too late for an afternoon boat trip, but booked Sugiman for a private evening river cruise. In the grounds of the lodge there was a group of **red leaf monkeys**, as well as a **plantain squirrel**. Dinner on the riverside veranda was interrupted by a rather beautiful **mangrove cat snake** on a branch about a metre from our table. Afterwards we headed out with **Sugi** along the **Manango tributary**, and sure enough we found **flat-headed cat**. Indeed, we saw two, both on the way back, at about 2045 and 2110. The first very quickly skulked away, allowing only enough time for us to glimpse it briefly. The second was an excellent view — it sat on the bank very still, just a few metres from the bank, grooming itself for at least 20 minutes. We were thrilled! We also saw a **leopard cat**, very briefly, some **large flying foxes**, several small grey bats (which seem from the Payne & Francis accounts to be **Horsfield's Myotis**) skimming the water, and a couple of **estuarine crocodiles**.

The next morning we went on a group bird cruise, from which we saw loads of cool birds, but no mammals. Afterwards we went to **Gomantong Caves** and were lucky enough to witness the swift nest collectors doing their thing, staggeringly high up and with very limited safety equipment! The wildlife was also fantastic – with **orangutan**, **Prevost's** and **plain pygmy squirrel** on the boardwalk to the caves. The Park display boards suggest that the most common bats in the main cave are **acuminate horseshoe bats**, but we also found a few distinctively-marked **diadem roundleaf bats** in a side chamber. The **wrinkle-lipped bats** are apparently in the next cave along – which we only learnt on our return to the UK! We also saw a **striped bronzeback** and a **crested green lizard** from the boardwalk on the way back to the car.

That afternoon we took the cruise to the **oxbow lake**, and saw the usual trio of monkeys – **long-tailed** and **pig-tailed macaques** and **proboscis monkeys** (including one pair that were mating), as well as **Storm's stork**, but unfortunately no **silvered langur** – although **Sugi** explained the best way to see these was on afternoon cruises as at that time they move closer to the river. In the evening we went on a night walk with **Sugi** in search of **moonrat**. Though we failed to find these, we did see 7 lantern bugs on one tree, which was pretty spectacular. Once back at the hotel, dad also saw a **long-tailed giant rat** in a big clump of bamboo by the car park. Our final morning was again spent out with **Sugi** but this time on a private cruise. This produced even more spectacular birds (including a **hooded pitta**, and a calling **Diard's trogon**), and we spent nearly 30 minutes with a large male **orangutan** who seemed not at all bothered by our presence, and had great views of **proboscis monkey**. That was the end of our brief trip to the Kinabatangan and we travelled on to Danum.

Following a lunch stop in Lahad Datu we arrived mid-afternoon at **Danum Valley Field Centre** (seeing **pig-tailed macaque** on the way), and after settling in took a brief walk to the bridge in search of **otter**. We thought we had struck lucky when I spotted a large animal swimming towards us, but as it got nearer it became clear it was the resident **water monitor** – still pretty special, but not an otter! We spent early evening on the bridge, and at ~1835 a **red giant flying squirrel** flew across the river. Interestingly the tour guide who was there (**Bedley**, of Sticky Rice Travel) was whistling to encourage the squirrel to fly, a trick I would see repeated later for **black giant flying squirrel**.

That night we went out on a walk in search of tarsier. We walked along the Nature Trail, and about two thirds of the way round (working clockwise) our guide was able to smell (yes smell!) a western tarsier. We were able to sit with it for at least 15 minutes, and got some rather nice photos too. There were also plenty of fun frogs and insects on the rest of the walk. The following morning we headed off along the West Trail, as far as W15. We heard plenty of great argus pheasants calling, and saw scarlet-rumped trogon and blue-headed pitta. In terms of mammals, we had a great view of a family of 4 Bornean gibbons tumbling down a tree, as well as Low's squirrel and a large treeshrew. At W9 there is also a hollow log that crosses the path, in which I spotted what we later keyed-out from photos as a roosting lesser woolly horeshoe bat; the same bat was present on a couple of other occasions when I walked past (but did eventually fly out after many people walked over the log). And on the way back there was a troop of red leaf monkeys, and we heard red muntjac barking. On our return for breakfast, Bedley told us he had seen a moonrat right at the start of the Nature Trail on his previous night's night walk. We spent the evening on the bridge again, and though there was no otter, we saw the red giant flying squirrel again, and managed to work out (with the help of the Danum vertebrate list) that the bats flying low across the river were very probably large brown Myotis. We then headed out on a spotlighting drive and saw Malay civet, small-toothed palm civet, common palm civet, Thomas' flying squirrel, red giant flying squirrel, bearded pig, and most excitingly, Bornean slow loris and greater chevrotain. The next morning we drove to the Fire Tower for sunrise. The view would have been spectacular (as I would witness during my field course) but unfortunately on that morning was very cloudy and so we hardly saw the sun, let alone the sunrise!

After that we headed off to **Borneo Rainforest Lodge** for the day. We had arranged for a packed lunch, which we forgot to collect, only to remember 10 minutes down the road. This turned out to be a great bit of luck – on our second attempt at leaving DVFC (0800) and about 1.5km out of camp we saw a **yellow-throated marten** cross the road. We spent the day at **BRL**, and on one of the short loops near the restaurant we saw a **plantain squirrel** and a **painted treeshrew** (they have very obvious red-orange tails). Late in the afternoon we saw two mother-offspring pairs of **orangutan** at the lodge end of the **canopy walkway**, on which there was also a large amount of civet poo. Over dinner, we saw a **Polynesian rat** scuttle across the restaurant, and downstairs dad saw another **longtailed giant rat**. Driving back we once again saw **large flying fox** and then the heavens opened, and we didn't see anything.

The next morning we headed off relatively early on a short walk, along the road, until the 2km marking – mainly with the aim of seeing **Bornean bristlehead**. We failed to find them, but had nice views of **sambar** and **bearded pig**, as well as hearing a roar-like call – which we later learnt was **pig-tailed macaque**. We then headed on to **Tabin**, via a brief stop for a blocked tree which, because we happened to be giving a lift to DVFC's lead botanist, gave us time for a fantastic impromptu botany lesson on the diversity of roadside **gingers**.

### **Tabin – 1-3 September**

We arrived at **Tabin** mid-afternoon and used our first walk to go to the now rather run-down Tabin Wildlife Resort (we stayed instead with a colleague of dad's). While we didn't manage to catch up with any of the **otters** reported from the river there we did see a **pygmy squirrel** and bumped into the resident troop of **pig-tailed macaques**. The next two morning walks there were similar — with **pig-tailed macaque** common, as well as **Prevost's squirrel** and a cream-coloured morph of the **giant squirrel**. On top of this, we also saw a pair of young **Bornean gibbons**, which amusingly crossed the lodge driveway just by the 'Gibbon's Crossing' sign. They were there again on our second afternoon and were evidently much more comfortable with people than any of the gibbons we saw at **Deramakot** or **Danum**. Spotlighting over the two nights was good but not fantastic — **leopard cat**, **common palm civet, Malay civet, Thomas' flying squirrel** and **red giant flying squirrel**. And with that our trip around the lowland rainforests of Sabah was complete.

#### Mount Kinabalu – 3-4 September

We left for **Lahad Datu** airport before dawn on 3 September, and along the road we saw a **Malaysian field rat** dart across – our first lifer at **Tabin.** We arrived in **Kota Kinabalu** around 0900 and met up with another of dad's colleagues who drove us towards **Mount Kinabalu.** We had a brief stopover at **Kinabalu Mountain Lodge** – recently taken over by a new team including well-known birder **Ooi Chin Hock**. There we met with their temporary 'naturalist in residence' – **Joe England** – who had installed a bird table in the grounds. The fruit on it brought in both **Jentink's squirrel** and **Mountain treeshrew.** 

After lunch we got a taxi to **Poring Hot Springs** and met up with **Lupa Masa**'s **Mike Gordon** (who probably had the best eyes for spotlighting I have ever been out with). We spent the afternoon pottering around the local area, with a visit to see some local **rafflesias** (they are ridiculous!) and also the **bat cave**. It was clear visitors seldom wanted to visit the caves, but after we got directions (it was **Mike's** first time too) we soon found them and saw at least 100 **fawn roundleaf bats**.

We then walked in to Lupa Masa camp, and spent from about 2100 to midnight spotlighting with Mike along the trails around camp. We saw loads of cool insects, fun frogs and also a couple of Bornean keeled pit vipers, including one rather large (~1.3m) one by the showers! We spotted several long-tailed mountain rats running along the rock faces that line the streams. We also saw diadem roundleaf bat and trefoil horseshoe bat momentarily perch on the underside of large leaves. Both are easily recognisable – the former by the large white dots along its side, and the latter from its yellow horseshoe. The next morning we set off relatively early for the National Park, hopping in a taxi with Mike to meet Joe at the Timphoon Gate. En route we took a brief stop for Mike to point out some of the roadside pitcher plants. By the gate itself we saw mountain treeshrew and Bornean mountain ground squirrel on the ground, as well as plenty of very bold Bornean black-banded squirrels that were eager to take food off the other tourists on the platform above the gate. We then wandered back down the road towards Park HQ, and having Joe with us meant we saw some fantastic birds (including Whitehead's trogon). Even more excitingly we also saw plenty of Jentink's squirrels, Kinabalu squirrel and Whitehead's pygmy squirrel. The latter two were roughly halfway between the gate and HQ, with Whitehead's pygmy squirrel relatively easy to find when we listened out for the high-pitched squeak which they share with the plain pygmy. Just above HQ and we saw a black morph giant squirrel (with a red neck). After that, and lunch at the Kinabalu Mountain Lodge we headed back to KK to have sundowners while the sun was still setting.

#### **Back to Danum – 5-17 September**

Dad headed off early that morning, and I met up with my field course in the evening (not before I'd hand-washed all my smelly field clothes and hung them out in the Hyatt!). On the field course I saw more of the same (including another western tarsier). There was a striped bronzeback in the DVFC dining room one afternoon, and Bornean bristleheads which were seen most days, including from the veranda! By the radio tower one night there was Wagler's pit viper — probably the most beautiful snake I have ever seen; and I found an orange bellied mud snake near the nature trail. We also saw a flying snake from the bridge — my friend saw it fly, but I only saw it after it landed. A flying frog on a night walk completed my flying herp/amphibian trio (flying lizards were pretty common around DVFC during the day).

Mammal-wise, I got four species that I hadn't seen at **Danum** before but had seen earlier on my trip — a **black giant flying squirrel**, a **painted treeshrew**, a **lesser chevrotain**, and a **dark-tailed niviventer** at the **camp site**. I also saw three new mammals for the trip: **colugo** (on a night drive), **large pencil-tailed tree-mouse** (on a night walk) and a **Hardwicke's woolly bat** that got caught early one morning in a mist net just off of the **nature trail**.

Others on the field course saw some things I missed: **Hose's langur** was seen around 1030 in the morning on the **left hand fork to the Tembeling waterfall** (I was stood next to the guy when he saw it – albeit for a second or two – but still not sure how I conspired to miss it!). **Banded linsang** and **banded palm civet were** seen on a night walk along the **east trail**; and **smooth otter** seen briefly on at 1030 on our penultimate day from the main river bridge—apparently the first sighting for nearly three weeks. There was also a **common porcupine** that crossed the road as people drove back from **BRL. Great argus pheasants** were seen twice on their display ground on the **left hand fork to the Tembeling waterfall**, where an unidentified shrew was also reported.

# Mammal species list

Below is a list of all species we identified, including 2 which we only heard. The places we saw them are given if there were 2 or fewer sightings for the entire trip.

- 1. Common treeshrew Taman Negara
- 2. Long-footed treeshrew Deramakot
- 3. Mountain treeshrew Mt Kinabalu
- 4. Large treeshrew DVFC
- 5. Painted treeshrew BRL and DVFC
- 6. Large flying fox
- 7. Acuminate horseshoe bat Gomantong caves
- 8. Lesser woolly horseshoe bat DVFC (W9)
- 9. Trefoil horseshoe bat Lupa Masa
- 10. Diadem roundleaf bat Gomantong and Lupa Masa
- 11. Fawn roundleaf bat Poring Hot Springs bat cave
- 12. Hardwicke's woolly bat DVFC
- 13. Large brown Myotis the fairly large Myotis feeding over the river at DVFC were most probably these

- 14. Horsfield's Myotis the fairly small greyish Myotis feeding over the river on the Kinabantagan at Sukau were most probably these
- 15. Colugo DVFC
- 16. Sunda slow loris Taman Negara
- 17. Bornean slow loris Deramakot and DVFC
- 18. Western tarsier DVFC
- 19. Red leaf monkey
- 20. White-thighed langur
- 21. Dusky langur Fraser's Hill
- 22. Proboscis monkey
- 23. Long-tailed macaque
- 24. Southern pig-tailed macaque
- 25. White-handed gibbon (heard only) Taman Neagara
- 26. Bornean gibbon
- 27. Siamang (heard only) Fraser's Hill
- 28. Bornean orangutan
- 29. Cream-coloured giant squirrel
- 30. Kinabalu squirrel Mt Kinabalu
- 31. Prevost's squirrel
- 32. Sunda black-banded squirrel Taman Negara
- 33. Bornean black-banded squirrel Mt Kinabalu
- 34. Grey-bellied squirrel
- 35. Pallas' squirrel Fraser's Hill
- 36. Plantain squirrel
- 37. Western striped squirrel Fraser's Hill
- 38. Low's squirrel DVFC (on the west trail)
- 39. Jentink's squirrel Mt Kinabalu
- 40. Slender squirrel Taman Negara
- 41. Red-cheeked squirrel Fraser's Hill
- 42. Bornean mountain ground squirrel Mt Kinabalu
- 43. Whitehead's pygmy squirrel Mt Kinabalu
- 44. Plain pygmy squirrel Mt Kinabalu
- 45. Black giant flying squirrel Deramakot and DVFC
- 46. Thomas' flying squirrel
- 47. Red giant flying squirrel
- 48. Spotted (lesser) giant flying squirrel Fraser's Hill
- 49. Polynesian rat BRL
- 50. Malaysian field rat Tabin
- 51. Dark-tailed niviventer Kumbang hide (Taman Negara) and DVFC
- 52. Long-tailed mountain rat Lupa Masa
- 53. Grey tree rat Tabing hide (Taman Negara)
- 54. Long-tailed giant rat Sukau and BRL
- 55. Large pencil-tailed tree-mouse DVFC
- 56. Yellow-throated marten DVFC
- 57. Malay civet
- 58. Binturong Deramakot
- 59. Small-toothed palm civet
- 60. Common palm civet

- 61. Leopard cat
- 62. Flat-headed cat Sukau
- 63. Asian elephant Deramakot
- 64. Malayan tapir Kumbang hide (Taman Negara)
- 65. Wild boar Taman Negara
- 66. Bearded pig
- 67. Lesser chevrotain Taman Negara and DVFC
- 68. Greater chevrotain DVFC
- 69. Red muntjac Taman Negara
- 70. Sambar