

# Southeast Asia Expedition 2008 Trip Report

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**Countries Visited:** Thailand & Malaysia

**Thailand Locations:** Khao Luang (Krung Chin), Kaeng Krachan, Khao Yai and Pang Sida, Koh Lanta National Parks as well as Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Area and Bueng Boraphet Non-hunting Area.

**Sabah Locations:** Sepilok Virgin Forest Preserve, Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, Tabin and Danum Valley Wildlife Areas

**Dates:** July 9 through August 18, 2008

**Tour Operator:** Thailand – self, Sabah – Borneo Ecotours

**Group:** myself, wife and 5 year old son (best travel partners ever!!!)

## Thailand

### **Khao Luang National Park (1 full day with lots of partial day visits)**

My wife and I maintain a residence just outside the national park and have been viewing wildlife there for years with some success. We have continually missed the zoological high points over the years including such species as the Malayan Tapir, Asian slow loris and stump-tailed macaques, but had some success with other species this year with quality sightings of Lowe's squirrels, western striped squirrels, giant black and white squirrels and Indochinese ground squirrels. We heard an elephant crashing through the jungle for the first time ever in Khao Luang along the Krung Chin waterfalls trail. Our two best sightings were a Sunda pangolin (!!!!) and a stump-tailed macaque troop (*Macaca arctoides*) – very excited with both accounts! Khao Luang is also an outstanding birding location and is off the beaten path enough to allow one to escape the noisy Thai crowds (at least some parts of the park allow this...). This rarely visited park is a worth a trip if you are in the south. Although you may have to self-drive as outfitters rarely go there.

### **Koh Lanta National Park (1 full day with some partial day visits)**

We are fortunate to have some more properties on this island have been spending several weeks a year here as well. Koh Lanta is a spectacular island. The mid-rib of the island boasts a rarely visited yet surprisingly prolific patch of primary and secondary dipterocarp forest protected by the national park (not to be confused with Koh Lanta Marine National Park). The best entry point is on the southern part of the island. This year we were fortunate to have quality viewings of dusky langurs (two large troops), Pallas's squirrels, common treeshrew, crab-eating macaques and a Sunda colugo sleeping at eye level right next to the parking area. We also had some great herpetological sightings and bird viewing there.

### **Kaeng Krachan National Park (2 full days)**

No doubt one of the premier wildlife destinations in Thailand, Kaeng Krachan should be high on everyone's 'gotta-go-to' list. The best location for wildlife is near the Thale Mog ("sea" fog) viewing area near the Myanmar border – the west end of the park in and around the camping area and main road. We were very encouraged to see much fresh guar sign along the road there but we were skunked for that species yet again (I have been trying to see a damn gaur for over a decade now in at least three different countries!). Highlights of this location were Pallas's and grey-bellied squirrels, western striped squirrels, red muntjac, masked palm civet, white-handed gibbons, dusky langurs, crab-eating macaques, Malay porcupines and Asian elephant. Although we only a few mammals, we counted well over 75 species of birds in two days – truly an amazing birding spot! There was a Ficus tree in full fruit right next to the camping area that had over 50 species of birds at a time on that amazing tree. As with all Thai national parks, this is a place to be avoided during weekends and or holidays. We had the distinct pleasure of staying there during both – sleep is evidently something not needed by the Thai and maintaining a quiet camp ground is not a priority for the rangers as the signs warning no loud music, singing, noise in general seem to be purely for decoration.....

### **Huai Kha Kaeng Wildlife Reserve (5 full days)**

There is little doubt that Hua Kha Khaeng and the other protected areas of the Western Forest Complex are the last hope for many of Southeast Asia's mega fauna. Consisting of primary, secondary and tertiary forests, HKK is an amazing wildlife hotspot. We had to procure special permits to enter which needed to be done in Bangkok. My wife being Thai made this a breeze. We were allowed virtually any activity we wanted – with the exception of multi-day back country expeditions. This was no issue as we were not equipped for such. We tried to enter the southern entrance initially near Ban Mae Dee but got hopelessly stuck in about 2 feet of red Thai mud in our high profile (but two-wheel drive) truck. After spending some time getting out of this mess we decided to spend our remaining five days up north near the reserve's headquarters. We hooked up with the camp host (the name escapes me but I can absolutely find out if someone needs a good guide there) who initially did not strike me as someone who knew what he was doing, but after spending some seriously intense time in the bush of HKK, it became quickly clear this guy knew the land like the back of his hand and was a very skilled tracker. He did not speak English however (not an issue for us – wife is native and I am proficient enough.)

Highlights of HKK included quality sightings of Asian elephants (at uncomfortably close quarters – three meters behind bamboo until they smelled us and stampeded through the forest like a frickin' freight train leaving a massive swath of destruction in their wake...), two separate herds of Banteng, tons of sambar deer and red or common muntjac (and one possible Fea's but I am not counting it), ferret badgers, Burmese hare, hairy-footed flying squirrel, northern tree shrews, Asiatic golden jackals (along the main road), crab-eating macaques, fresh leopard and tiger sign, and many species of birds and reptiles. The region we visited is rife with prey and there is little doubt of healthy felid and other predator populations.

### **Khao Yai National Park (2 full days)**

Thailand's most famous national park by far, Khao Yai rarely disappoints. We have been traveling there at least once a year for nearly a decade now and have always been pleasantly surprised. This year was no different although we failed yet again to see gaur – even though we traveled 90 km to the east side of the park to a viewing tower that was “guaranteed” to produce gaur...oh well, something else to keep trying for... The species seen this year included masked, large and small Indian civets, variable squirrels (at least three morphs), giant black squirrels, white-handed and pileated (heard on numerous occasions) gibbons, crab-eating and northern pig-tailed macaques, Asiatic golden jackels, northern tree shrews, Indochinese field rat, elephants (heard only this time). We even came across a lounging pack of dhole near one of the water holes of the 400 buildings. There is little question that the high point of Khao Yai (and for the summer for that matter) was the sighting of a CLOUDED LEOPARD on 17 August 2008 @ 11:30 AM on a warm sunny morning near the western entrance just past the waterfalls along the main road! We were literally done with our amazing expedition season for 2008 and heading home to southern Thailand. Wow – what a way to finish our trip!

### **Pang Sida National Park (1.5 days)**

We visited this park with the primary target species being gaur, yet sadly we were skunked again... But we did very much enjoy our stay there. We had a great time cruising the main road all night long spotlighting from the hood of our truck. It was great to be in charge of the lights ourselves as some of the other spotters in places like Khao Yai leave much to be desired. We saw some great owls and nightjars, but our mammals for Pang Sida were limited to some sambar, masked palm civet, and some Indochinese ground squirrels. It is a very spectacular destination and we will be sure to spend more time there in the future.

### **Bueng Boraphet Non-hunting Area (2 days)**

This was primarily a birding spot but I believe it could produce some great rodent diversity if you had some Elliott traps and the like. We had a great two days birding the heck out of this place – tons of species and quality sightings. We will be leading a group there this December in the peak of the migration – wish us luck!

## **Sabah Borneo (17 days in country)**

There is little doubt that Borneo is one of my favorite wildlife destinations, not only in Southeast Asia, but the planet! We ended up with over forty species of mammals and a tad over 200 species of bird, and poop-loads of herps for the trip! We designed our trip there with few destinations and max-time-spent-per-destination as possible.

### **Kinabatangan River (seven full days)**

Clearly one of the world's great wildlife viewing destinations, Kinabatangan rarely disappoints. Due to the EXTREME environmental degradation in the surrounding regions, the wildlife is concentrated in most likely unnaturally high densities. While there we spent most of our time at the Sukau Rainforest Lodge which I can highly recommend – great food, wonderful atmosphere, splendid location with a very high eco-

ethic. I really appreciated their electric motor boats and the willingness of their guides to go the extra mile for our needs. We ended up with a private guide for several of our days there – name Jumaidi – great guide and with a willingness to work on the “targets”.

Our sightings there included masked and common palm civets, lesser mouse deer, sambar (rare there!), plain pygmy, plaintain, Prevost’s squirrels, tons of Bornean pygmy elephants, bearded pigs, silvered and maroon langurs, orang-utans, southern pig-tailed and crab-eating macaques, proboscis monkeys, smooth otters, wrinkle-lipped bats, lesser woolly horseshoe bats and over 90 species of birds and countless herps. One sad point – my first two days on the river I was recovering from a horrible spider bite and missed my one opportunity to see a Bornean clouded leopard which was spotted by my boat the one night I was too ill to go on a night cruise..... Many folks got some great shots of it however....

### **Tabin Wildlife Preserve (5 full days)**

We were very pleasantly surprised at the amazing variety of wildlife we were fortunate to see at Tabin. Although I have to admit our luck was in a large way NOT due to the horribly managed Tabin Lodge...oh my god! In all my years eco-traveling and leading safaris myself, I have never seen such a poorly managed lodge ever. The food was horrendous and they try to put all clients in the non-AC, rat-infested river-front cottages. Be sure to request the lodges on the hill – great spots! But we made the best of it as it really is the only comfortable lodging in the region. We were actually able to get some good safaris out of Jody while there and did have some great luck there. Species encountered there included Hose’s langur, crab-eating and pig-tailed macaques, orang-utans (including “Toby”, a rather unsuccessful Sepilok release that refuses to sleep in trees and tries to board any car that passes by – a really sad sight to see...), Bornean gibbons, moon rat, lesser tree shrews, masked, common, small-toothed, Malay civets, binturong, Malaysian field rat, Bornean Pygmy elephants (heard only), bearded pigs, oriental small clawed and smooth otters, sambar, red giant and spotted flying squirrels, and Prevost’s, and ear-spot squirrels and at least 17 leopard cats along the road between the park and the surrounding oil palm fields – one of the few dividends of the oil palm plantations.

### **Danum Valley Wildlife Area (5 full days)**

Being one of the last remaining tracks of primary forest, the Danum offers great opportunities for wildlife watching! But also due to the maturity of the forest, seeing the wildlife is also more challenging than some other locations like the Kinabatangan and Tabin. We stayed at the Danum Valley Field Center in their guest rooms which were more than adequate. The food was plentiful and OK. We did spend an afternoon at the famous Rainforest Lodge – wow! Talk about cush! We arranged a day trip there from Borneo Ecotours which included a guided trek to the canopy walk, dinner, a shower room (which ended up being the prime-minister’s suite!!!!) and a night safari drive back to the DVFC. The night drive was fantastic – not necessarily due to the diversity of sightings, but because of the rig. The put us in the back of a Hylux with a padded teak bench safely secure to the back of the bed for my wife, son and I to relax and enjoy. And during the 45+ km drive back we had two experienced spotters nailing both sides of the roads. We

were all fairly inebriated by the start of the trip and the party continued until after midnight when we finally arrived at the DVFC! Night drives are doable at the DVFC but having your own vehicle would be better as the rangers are not the best spotters. We hooked up with a couple with their own truck. This combined with my wife's and my spotting experience, we were able to lock in some great stuff.

Sightings in the Danum included Orang-utans, crab-eating and southern pig-tailed macaques, Sunda slow loris, common, small-toothed, Malay civets, leopard cats, a new and distinct subspecies of maroon langur, tons of sambar, Bornean pygmy elephants, bearded pigs, giant, Prevost's and plain pygmy squirrels, red giant, black and Vordermann's flying squirrels, large flying fox, oriental small clawed otters and Bornean gibbons brachiating right in front of us at the cantina of the DVFC.

### **Complete Species Lists:**

#### **Thailand**

<b><u>Common Name</u></b>	<b><u>Numbers seen</u></b>
1. common tree shrew	2
2. northern tree shrew	2
3. Indochinese forest rat	1
4. Pallas's squirrel	5+
5. black and white giant squirrel	10+
6. Lowe's squirrel	10+
7. western striped squirrel	10+
8. variable squirrel	4
9. Indochinese ground squirrel	3
10. hairy-footed flying squirrel	1
11. Malayan porcupine	5
12. Sunda colugo	1
13. crab-eating macaque	100+
14. northern pig-tailed macaque	100+
15. stump-tailed macaque	3
16. dusky langur	30+
17. Phayre's langur	1
18. Asian elephant	2
19. Asiatic golden jackel	6
20. dhole	5
21. banteng	20+
22. Lyle's flying fox	?
23. ferret badger	1
24. yellow-throated marten	1
25. masked palm civet	2
26. large Indian civet	1
27. small Indian civet	2
28. sambar deer	50+
29. red muntjac	10+

30. white-handed gibbon	5
31. pileated gibbon (voice call only)	?
32. clouded leopard!!!	1
33. Burmese hare	4
34. Sunda pangolin	1

### **Borneo**

1. lesser treeshrew	2
2. moonrat	1
3. Prevost's squirrel	10+
4. plantain squirrel	6
5. giant squirrel	1
6. red giant flying squirrel	6
7. giant black flying squirrel	1
8. spotted flying squirrel	1
9. Vordermann's flying squirrel	1
10. plain pygmy squirrel	6
11. Malaysian field rat	1
12. four-stripped ground squirrel	3
13. Malayan porcupine	1
14. Bornean gibbon (H. m. abotti)	10+
15. Bornean gibbon (H. m. funerus)	3
16. Hose's langur	2
17. silvered langur	25+
18. maroon langur (P. r. ignita)	8
19. maroon langur (P. r. rubicunda)	20+
20. southern pig-tailed macaque	50+
21. crac-eating macaque	50+
22. proboscis monkey	100+
23. slow loris	2
24. Bornean pygmy elephant	40+
25. Malay civet	13
26. common palm civet	12
27. small-toothed sivet	4
28. masked civet	1
29. binturong	1
30. lesser mouse deer	1
31. greater mouse deer	2
32. sambar deer	20+
33. bearded pig	20+
34. leopard cat	17
35. wrinkle-lipped bat	billions
36. lesser woolly horseshoe bat	2
37. large flying fox	5
38. oriental small clawed otter	12
39. smooth otter	20+

40. ferret badger  
41. orang-utan

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