

# SUMATRA: WAY KAMBAS NATIONAL PARK

27 May – 4 June 2012

Richard Webb

## INTRODUCTION

After two unsuccessful attempts to see Sunda Clouded Leopard in Borneo and two unsuccessful attempts to see its mainland counterpart in Thailand, reports of sightings in Way Kambas lead me to spend a week there in May 2012 particularly with the outside chance of Asian Tapir and a host of other species as well.

Unfortunately the leopard eluded me again but great views of the next best thing, Marbled Cat, more than compensated for it along with another 25 species and some great birds as well.

The place itself is fantastic and a real pleasure to visit compared with other sites such as Danum in Sabah. It is much better value for money than Danum as well and I cannot recommend it highly enough. Prior to my visit there had been quite a lot of negative feedback on visiting Way Kambas on <http://mammalwatching.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/way-kambas-sumatra/> but I can honestly say that most of these are inaccurate in my experience. Although areas were logged in the 1970s it is still a great area of forest and largely undisturbed making it a pleasure to visit.

## LOGISTICS

- **Getting there** – I flew to Jakarta with Air Malaysia and then onto Bandar Lampung with Garuda. The lodge then provided transfers from Bandar Lampung to the lodge. The internal flight cost £80 return. You can get there cheaper by catching a bus from Jakarta to Merak, a ferry from Merak to Tanjung Karang and then another bus to Way Kambas but to be honest time was more important to me than money so I took the flight.
- **Accommodation** –
  1. The cheapest accommodation is at the guesthouse at Way Kanan Substation which has rooms with shared toilet and shower and you can cook your own food or arrange for the rangers to cook for you for a fee. You will need to take your own mosquito nets.
  2. I stayed outside the park at Satwa Ecolodge. [www.ecolodgesindonesia.com/satwa](http://www.ecolodgesindonesia.com/satwa) . Most if not all of the bird tour groups stay here now and I can thoroughly recommend it particularly as they can help overcome some of the bureaucracy around the use of guards/guides. I booked everything through [ecosafari@ecolodgesindonesia.com](mailto:ecosafari@ecolodgesindonesia.com) and Nyoman who I dealt with responded to all my queries quickly and efficiently. The total cost for 8 nights was £830. This included 8-nights' single accommodation on a B&B basis. I cooked my own food at other times having taken a small hotplate with me. It also included transfers to and from Bandar Lampung, full use of a 4WD with driver and guide throughout, all park entrance and guide fees, 5 boat trips (these cost USD50 each if booked separately), and unlimited bottled water etc. Compared to the likes of Danum this was very good value for money particularly as spotlighting sessions often lasted 3-4 hours. Although it gets busier with visiting tour groups at some times I was the only guest on 5 out of the 8 nights I was there. The staff could not have been more helpful, running into 'town' to pick things up for me, cooking breakfast when I returned from the forest mid-morning and being up well before dawn to look for mammals.
- **When to visit** – The dry season starts in May and lasts until late August/early September. Most bird tours visit in July-September when it is hot and dry with occasional heavy showers. I tried the start of the dry season in the hope that heavy afternoon rain might lead to more activity on the tracks at night and on the day of heavy rain it proved right. However on

balance although the cooler temperatures made it more pleasant it could be even better at the end of the dry season when some species may be easier to see around water courses.

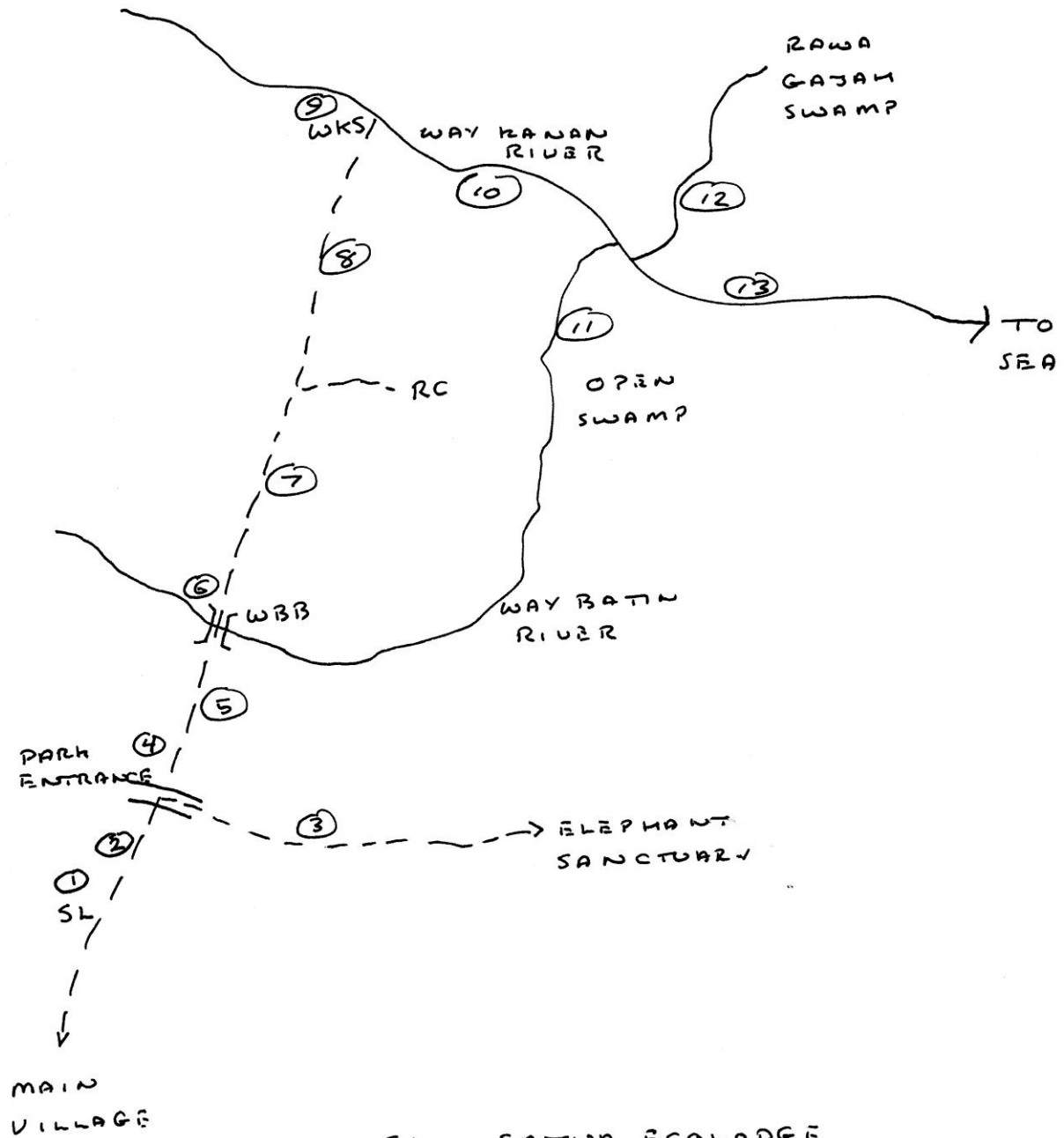
- **Guides** – I pre-booked a bird guide called Hari, [hariyono\\_ecolodges@yahoo.com](mailto:hariyono_ecolodges@yahoo.com) through the lodge as he also had a good knowledge of the mammals as well. By the end of the trip he knew even more. Hari was excellent and worked long hours particularly spotlighting. He was excellent at picking eyeshine up in the spotlight. He is very popular with tour groups so should be booked in advance. You also have to take a park guard/guide with you at all times due to the 'dangers' of tigers, elephants etc. This is a waste of time but with Hari present I was able to organise it so that the extra guide stayed with the car or walked behind us to avoid disturbance. This worked well. On the boat trips we always had two boatmen with us and they were keen to spot things so actually proved to be an asset.
- **Insects** - Mosquitoes were pleasingly scarce even in the forest and along the river at night, although I would have needed a net had I stayed at the substation. At the lodge although there were no nets the screened windows worked and I only had the odd mosquito in my room. Way Kambas has a reputation for leeches but although I picked up a few away from the main track the leech socks worked and I only picked up one bite.

## MAMMAL WATCHING IN WAY KAMBAS

- **Timings** - In late May/early June it gets light at 0600 and dark roughly 12 hours later. We tended to be out between 0400 and 0500 (once 0300) for a short spotlighting session before it got light, stayed out until 1000, and then rested until 1600, We would then be out again until 2100 or later. In the mornings we tended to drive the full 13 kms of the jeep track and then return alternating between walking and driving sections (see site guide below).
- **Spotlighting** –
  1. Way Kambas is renowned as one of the best locations for night birds in SE Asia, if not the world, and this is well-deserved. Mammal watching is more difficult although the full moon at the time of my visit did not help. As is often the case the best night with 9 species followed heavy rain with several species including 3 Leopard Cats and two species of civet actually out on the main jeep track.
  2. The other difficulty is that from a 4WD it is difficult to spotlight both the ground and the trees and it is necessary to spotlight higher levels for flying squirrels, civets and even cats. There is also a lot of ground cover. The lodge is considering obtaining a pick up so that you can spotlight more easily but until that time it is worth spending time spotlighting from the vehicle and on foot. Marbled Cat, Leopard Cat and three species of civet all allowed as to approach them down to a few feet on foot.
  3. Bear in mind that the road does get disturbed by rangers on motorbikes an hour after dawn and again an hour after dark but the disturbance is minimal.
- **Boat trips** –
  1. Boat trips give access to good areas for otters, Silvered Leaf Monkey are common and Asian Tapir, Clouded Leopard, Oriental Short-clawed Otter and Sun Bear have also been seen from boats.
  2. Although booked separately they cost USD50 for 2-3 hours it would be worth doing several particularly if you can do night trips using the current and paddles rather than the engine.
  3. Pre-book boats on arrival or as soon as you can to ensure their availability as we had to return early one morning as the boats were booked out from 0800 by another group.

SITE GUIDE

WAY KAMBAS NATIONAL PARK



- SL SATWA ECOLOGIE
- WBB WAY BATIN BRIDGE
- RC RHINO CENTRE
- WKS WAY KANAN SUBSTATION

1. **Satwa Ecolodge – Common Treeshrew is common in the grounds of the lodge.**
2. **Satwa Ecolodge to Park Entrance** – walking the road between the lodge and entrance after dark should produce Sunda Slow Loris. We saw 3 in 5 minutes when we tried. Great views.
3. **Road to Elephant Sanctuary** – follows the forest edge and we only drove this once prior to dawn one day and did not see anything but this road and the village itself can be good for Asian Elephant at nights. The paddies near the sanctuary itself can sometimes produce mongoose.
4. **Open woodland near entrance** – Always good for Indian Muntjac, often four or more in here at night.
5. **Upper Jeep Track from entrance to Way Batin Bridge (3-4 km)** – relatively unproductive during day other than for Indian Muntjac. Relatively poor at night but we did have Leopard Cat, Malayan Civet and Small-toothed Palm Civet along here at night. Note there is also a ginger domestic cat which we saw on 5 nights up to 1.5 kms from the entrance.
6. **Way Batin Bridge** – often good for Long-tailed Macaque and (Sundaic) Silvered Leaf Monkey. We also had our only Lesser Treeshrew, and Prevost's Squirrel here, and Hari saw a mongoose.
7. **Middle Jeep Track from Way Batin Bridge to Rhino Centre Junction (4-5 km)** – Good for Wild Boar and primates, Siamang, both macaques and Mitred Leaf Monkey. We also had Red Giant Flying Squirrel here. We had Sambar, Malayan Civet, Leopard Cat, Banded Palm Civet and Malayan Porcupine at night.
8. **Lower Jeep Track from Rhino Centre Junction to Way Kanan Substation (4 km)** –
  - The area to concentrate on. We had two Marbled Cats, three Leopard Cats, two Yellow-throated Martens, Small-toothed and Masked Palm Civet, lots of Wild Boar and Black-striped Squirrels, all four species of deer, both species of squirrel and 5 species of primate including Agile Gibbon along this stretch. Others have seen Sun Bear and Clouded Leopard along here. Also good for pheasants and Banded Pitta.
  - A couple of the advantages of this stretch are that the track is wider and the undergrowth more open in places making visibility better. There are also a couple of waterholes along this stretch that could be worth staking out particularly later in the dry season.
  - There are also a number of trails which run off of the main track. Most are animal trails and we generally only used them to approach mammals at night rather than actively walking them during the day.
9. **Way Kanan Substation** – a good area to get good views of both mouse-deer and Silvered Leaf Monkey and the second Marbled Cat was only 300 metres from the substation.
10. **Way Kanan River to junction with Rawa Gajah tributary** – Good for Greater Mouse-Deer, Silvered Leaf Monkey and Long-tailed Macaque. We also saw our only Malayan Flying Lemur here and Hari has seen Asian Tapir and Clouded Leopard.
11. **Way Batin River** – the lower end of the river before it joins the Way Kanan runs through open swamps that look excellent for elephant, tapir and potentially tiger and rhino, Spotlighting this area at dawn and dusk and better still late at night with the engine turned off could be very productive.
12. **Rawa Gajah** – we saw Sambar, Long-tailed Macaque and Silvered Leaf Monkey along here but could not get as far as the watchtowers as the water levels were too low and we did not have enough time to walk the final stretch. This area can be good for elephant and presumably with enough time could produce tapirs.
13. **Way Kanan River beyond Rawa Gajah tributary** – the best stretch for Oriental Short-clawed Otters and several people have seen Sun Bear on this stretch. The river eventually reaches the sea.

## REFERENCES

### Books

- *A Field Guide to the Mammals of South-East Asia* by Charles Francis
- *A Photographic Guide to Mammals of South-east Asia: Including Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Java, Sumatra, Bali and Borneo* by Charles M. Francis
- *A Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo* by J Payne and CM Francis

### Internet

- <http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/publications/ba8pdfs/olah-waykambas.pdf> - Excellent article on birding in Way Kambas, useful background reading.
- <http://mammalwatching.wordpress.com/2011/04/19/way-kambas-sumatra/> - Interesting feedback on mammal watching in Way Kambas but overly critical to my mind.
- <http://www.mammalwatching.com/Oriental/Otherreports/TL%20Trip%20report%20Sumatra%202011.pdf> – Report following on from previous reference.

## ITINERARY

- 27<sup>th</sup> Arrived Bandar Lampung at 1730 and transferred to Satwa Ecolodge arriving mid-evening but any thoughts of an early spotlighting session washed out literally by an impromptu storm.
- 28<sup>th</sup> Early morning spotlighting along main jeep track followed by morning along jeep trail until late morning, mainly watching from vehicle. Evening as morning including spotlighting until mid-evening. Had to walk the last kilometre or so of the track due to a fallen tree across the track. Hitched a lift back to the vehicle riding pillion on one of the rangers' motorbikes.
- 29<sup>th</sup> Morning as 28<sup>th</sup>. Late afternoon boat along Way Kanan River spotlighting back to Way Kanan Substation. Spotlighting back to entrance.
- 30<sup>th</sup> Morning as 28<sup>th</sup> but more time spent walking rather than driving the track. Late afternoon boat to Rawa Gajah, Unable to get to watchtowers due to low water levels but watched open grasslands from boat until shortly before dark, then spotlighted back to Way Kanan Substation before spotlighting back along jeep track.
- 31<sup>st</sup> Early morning along first five kilometres of the road to the Elephant Sanctuary and then along jeep track but morning washed out by torrential rain from about 0800 so returned to lodge. Late afternoon and evening along the jeep track with Red Giant Flying Squirrel before it even got dark. As often after heavy rain the best evening's spotlighting of the trip with 3 Leopard Cats, three species of civet and another flying squirrel.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Pre-dawn along the jeep track intending to take a boat out for spotlighting from 0500. Unfortunately another fallen tree delayed progress and after a 3 kilometre pillion ride down to the river finally set out in daylight at 0600. Rather disappointing with nothing of note. Late afternoon along jeep track followed by three hours spotlighting along Way Kanan and Way Batin rivers with little of note and a spotlighting session back along the jeep track arriving back at the lodge at 2230.
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Morning walking the jeep trail including two hours spotlighting pre-dawn. Late afternoon and evening along jeep track with untickable views (for me at least) of Marbled Cat.
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Early morning drive to Way Kanan followed by 3-hour (0500-0800) boat trip to unsuccessfully look for otters. Returned to lodge by 0930. Late afternoon 1630 departure for forest with long final spotlighting session well rewarded with great close range views of Marbled Cat.
- 4<sup>th</sup> 0530-0900 along main jeep track for one final time and rewarded with a Leopard Cat nonchalantly scent-marking at 0730 totally unaware of our presence 50 metres away. A great finale to the trip. Departed Satwa at 1000 finally arriving home 28 hours later.

**MAMMAL LIST (26 species)** – Nomenclature follows Duff & Lawson *Mammals of the World: A Checklist*. Alternative names in brackets.

### **Black-striped (Sunda Black-banded) Squirrel**

- Lower Jeep Track – 28<sup>th</sup> (1), 29<sup>th</sup> (5+), 30<sup>th</sup> (2), 31<sup>st</sup> (1) 2<sup>nd</sup> (2)

### **Prevost's Squirrel**

- Way Batin Bridge – 29<sup>th</sup> (2), 31<sup>st</sup> (1)
- Way Kanan River – Singles 29<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Lower Jeep Track – Singles 30<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>

### **Red Giant Flying Squirrel**

- 31<sup>st</sup> – amazing views of an individual out an hour before dark clambering around on an open trunk and gliding from tree to tree, Superb.

### **Malayan Porcupine**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> – one seen briefly crossing the Jeep Track pre-dawn.

### **Malayan Civet**

- Seen on night drives on the 28<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- One pre-dawn on the 30<sup>th</sup>.
- All on the mid and upper Jeep Track.

### **Masked Palm Civet**

One on the night drive on the 31<sup>st</sup> (lower Jeep Track)

### **Small-toothed Palm Civet**

- Singles on the lower Jeep Track on the night drives on the 31<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- Another on the upper Jeep Track on the 31<sup>st</sup>.
- One individual actually seen on the ground which is said to be unusual in this species.

### **Banded Palm Civet**

- One on the night drive on the 31<sup>st</sup> (middle Jeep Track).

### **Leopard Cat**

- 30<sup>th</sup> – one seen at close range along the upper Jeep Track.
- 31<sup>st</sup> – a large individual, presumably a male, hunting along the middle section of the Jeep Track shortly after dark.
- 31<sup>st</sup> – two, presumably young animals, as small and totally fearless as they sat watching us from a few feet away as we approached them on foot with the spotlight.
- 4<sup>th</sup> – an unexpected daylight sighting, a presumed male walking along the lower Jeep Track ninety minutes after first light, and scent marking, totally oblivious to us watching it from 50 metres away.

### **Marbled Cat**

- The high and low points of the trip. The low point an individual seen very badly (well by Hari) along the lower Jeep Track an hour after dark on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- The high point, another, seen well (and photographed) at close range for 5 minutes along the Jeep Track about 300 metres from Way Kanan Substation. Absolutely fantastic views of a great animal. Possibly a different animal to the night before as Hari had glimpsed another cat briefly in the same area on the 2<sup>nd</sup>.

### **Yellow-throated Marten**

- One along the lower Jeep Track on the 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Another seen by Hari along the lower Jeep Track on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- Another was seen in the same area a couple of days earlier by an American birder, Howie Nielsen.

### **Malayan Flying Lemur (Sunda Colugo)**

- 29<sup>th</sup> – one while spotlighting along Way Kanan River

### **Sunda Slow Loris**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> – three in five minutes while spotlighting on foot between the lodge and park entrance. Interestingly we had failed to find any from the vehicle on the previous six evenings.

### **Mitred Leaf Monkey (Langur)**

- Poor views along the lower Jeep Track on the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>.
- Two seen well near Way Batin Bridge on the 31<sup>st</sup>.

### **(Sundaic) Silvered Leaf Monkey (Langur)**

- Common along the Way Kanan River and the stream to Rawa Gajah swamp.
- Smaller numbers seen on two occasions around Way Batin Bridge.

### **Long-tailed Macaque**

- Common along the River, around the Way Kanan Substation and along the Jeep Track.
- Interesting encounter on the 2<sup>nd</sup> watching young macaques trying to jump the River only to fail and fall in to the interest of a crocodile below.

### **Sunda (Southern) Pig-tailed Macaque**

- Up to 10 seen along the Jeep Track on 7 of the 8 days.

### **Agile Gibbon**

- One seen briefly along the lower Jeep Track on the 30<sup>th</sup>.
- Totally unexpected as rarely encountered but seen independently by Hari and myself within seconds of each other.

### **Siamang**

- Heard widely every day. Seriously impressive in full song.
- Seen on 7 days with up to 10 (in up to 4 groups) being seen each day.

### **Lesser Treeshrew**

- 28<sup>th</sup>, one from the Way Batin Bridge.

### **Common Treeshrew**

- At least three around Satwa Ecolodge
- Seen along the Jeep Track on 4 days, at least 9 individuals, highly vocal.

### **Eurasian Wild Boar**

- Seen daily along the middle and lower sections of the Jeep Track.
- Maximum count 18 including a group of 14. At least two sounders with small young. One group of young (presumably days old, based on their size) were totally unconcerned about the vehicle and walked up to sniff the tyres

### **Lesser Mouse-Deer**

- Way Kanan Substation, 30<sup>th</sup> (1), 2<sup>nd</sup> (2).
- Lower Jeep Track, 3<sup>rd</sup> (2)

### **Greater Mouse-Deer**

- Way Kanan River – 29<sup>th</sup> (2), 30<sup>th</sup> (4)
- Way Kanan Substation – singles 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>.
- Lower Jeep Track – 2<sup>nd</sup> (2), 3<sup>rd</sup> (1)

### **Indian (Red) Muntjac**

- Commonest in the plantation near the entrance and along the upper Jeep Track but also seen along the lower section as well.
- 28<sup>th</sup> (4), 29<sup>th</sup> (5), 30<sup>th</sup> (3), 1<sup>st</sup> (4), 2<sup>nd</sup> (5), 3<sup>rd</sup> (4), 4<sup>th</sup> (5).

### **Sambar**

- Lower and Middle Jeep Track – 28<sup>th</sup> (1), 29<sup>th</sup> (5), 31<sup>st</sup> (2), 2<sup>nd</sup> (2), those on the 31<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> on night drives.
- Rawa Gajah – 30<sup>th</sup> 5 including 2 stags.
- Way Kanan River – 1<sup>st</sup> (2) on night cruise.

### **UNIDENTIFIED MAMMALS**

- **Flying Squirrel sp** - one seen distantly on the 31<sup>st</sup> was nothing more than eye shine.
- **Rat sp** - 27<sup>th</sup> – one seen from the departure lounge in Jakarta Airport. Singles seen while spotlighting on the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- **Bat sp** - Remarkably the rangers were not aware of any roosts in buildings at Way Kanan Substation and we only saw a handful of bats while spotlighting. Surprisingly all those seen were in the forest rather than over the rivers!
- **Civet sp** - a long slim civet that tore across the jeep track pre-dawn on 29<sup>th</sup> had a distinct white tip to the tail and may have been a Banded Linsang but the views were inconclusive. Another unidentified palm civet on the night drive on the 3<sup>rd</sup>.
- **Mongoose sp** - One seen briefly by Hari crossing the jeep track by the Way Batin Bridge on the 29<sup>th</sup> was probably a Collared.

### **OTHER POSSIBILITIES**

- **Sumatran Rhino** – occasionally encountered at camera traps but rarely in life. The best bet is probably to try late night boats particularly along Way Batin and without the engine. You can normally see rhinos at the breeding centre with a pre-arranged visit but at the time of my visit one of the two females was pregnant and due to give birth so all visits had been suspended, particularly as this is the first pregnancy that has run its full course for 12 years.



- **Asian Elephant** - Not seen but fresh droppings and damage to vegetation along the middle section of the Jeep Track on 3 days. Fresh droppings also along the lower stretches of Way Batin River. Later in the dry season commonly encountered in and around the village at night sometimes in groups of up to 60!
- **Asian Tapir** – commonly encountered at camera traps but rarely seen. Hari, my guide, had seen and photographed one along the Way Kanan River about 30 minutes from the Way Kanan Substation, two weeks prior to my visit. The photos were gripping. Occasionally seen at night along the jeep track. The best bet is probably cruising Way Batin late at night, as with rhinos paddling rather than using the engine.
- **Sumatran Tiger** –frequently encountered at camera traps but again rarely seen. Researchers on average see one a year and most of the rangers have never seen one. Two visitors to the lodge while I was there did go out with a researcher on one of the trails with camera traps one morning and did find fresh tracks and droppings. However they were told that this was normal but seeing tigers wasn't. Having said that one of the guides at Satwa had one walk across the jeep track 3 metres in front of his motorbike one afternoon in 2008.
- **Clouded Leopard** – occasionally seen by birding groups along the jeep track at night. One tour leader has seen three here. Hari had only ever seen one, swimming across the Way Kanan one evening.
- **Asian Golden and Flat-headed Cats** – occasionally camera-trapped but generally in areas well away from the main routes. Incidentally the picture of Flat-headed Cat on the board at the lodge is actually a Fishing Cat, a species that has recently been found not to have been fully documented as occurring on Sumatra.
- **Sun Bear** – occasionally encountered with birding groups occasionally seeing them along the jeep track or along the river, particularly beyond the Rawa Gajah tributary.
- **Oriental Short-clawed Otter** – apparently relatively easy later in the dry season when water levels are lower. The best area is along the Way Kanan River about 45 minutes from Way Kanan Substation and about a kilometre past the Rawa Gajah tributary. We only had an hour to look one morning as the boats had been booked out for the day.
- **Banded Linsang** – rare.
- **Collared Mongoose** – most likely to be seen in open areas near the Elephant Sanctuary.
- **Binturong** – probably the commonest large mammal that we did not encounter. Seen regularly when there are fruiting trees along the jeep track and river.

## BIRDS

I gave up chasing LBJs a few years back but Way Kambas has a quality bird list and some of the better species seen included:

- Lesser Adjutant
- Grey-headed and White-bellied Fish Eagle and Brahminy Kite
- Great Argus (1), Crested Fireback (common) and Red Junglefowl (common)
- Large Frogmouth (one, amazing views)
- Large-tailed (common) & Savanna Nightjar
- Buffy Fish Owl and Brown Hawk Owl (singles)
- Oriental Bay, Reddish Scops and Collared Scops Owl (all heard)
- Banded, Rufous-collared, Small Blue, Rufous-backed, Blue-eared, White-breasted and Stork-billed Kingfishers.
- Red-bearded Bee-eater, Dollarbird and Scarlet-rumped Trogon
- Oriental Pied Hornbill
- White-bellied, Crimson-winged, and Banded Woodpeckers.
- Brown and Red-crowned Barbets
- Banded (3) and Hooded (1) Pitta
- Dusky (1), Banded (1) and Black-and-Red Broadbill (common).