

Superlative wildlife, oil palm plantations and, for one, the Mt Kinabalu sore leg challenge in -

Sabah (Malaysia)

17th March to 3rd April 2005

Ted Nixon and Steve Anyon-Smith



Outline of Trip

This short holiday was conceived, planned and executed in a few weeks. The idea was to maximise our time in the field looking for wildlife by visiting only a few sites and spending a number days in each.

We made no attempt to visit any tourist attraction that was not aligned with the primary purpose for our visit. With the exception of a few dive sites that are accessible to pirates, hostage takers and other assorted rabble, there are probably no other attractions anyway.

WARNING: Although it is relatively easy to move between places in Sabah, there is a problem with pre-booking accommodation. For an unfathomable reason all accommodation

providers in Sabah, with one notable exception, have been trained in the Basil Fawly School of Customer Service.

Sites visited

The concrete outside Kota Kinabalu airport (three hours)

Borneo Rainforest Lodge in Danum Valley (4 nights)

Uncle Tan's Wildlife Camp on the Kinabatangan River (4 nights)

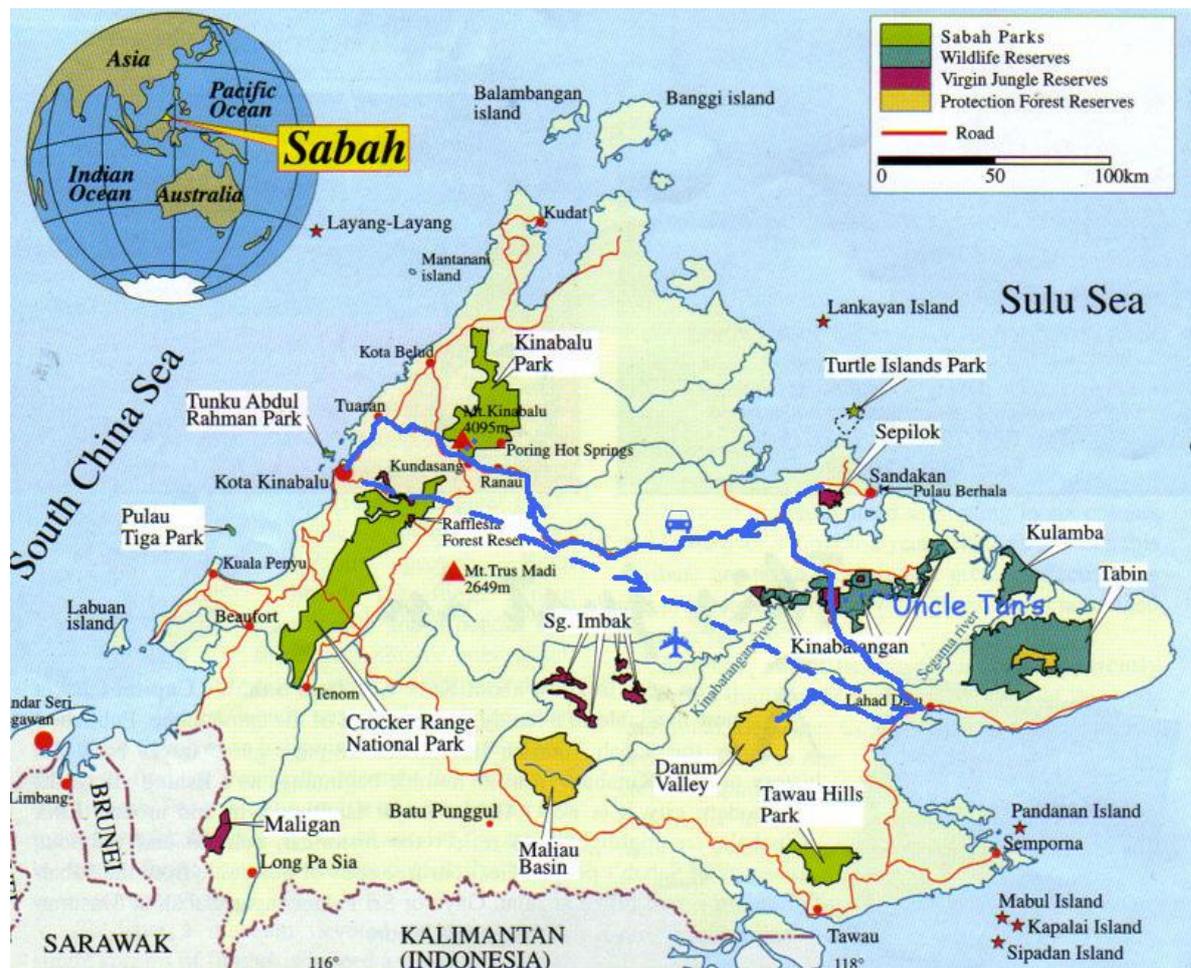
Gum Gum (outside Sepilok) for a visit to the orang-utan thing (1 night)

Mt Kinabalu (4 nights)

Poring Hot Springs (2 nights)

Kota Kinabalu (most of 1 night), this time not sleeping on the concrete

Various planes





view from the Mt Kinabalu descent

General comments on sites visited

Borneo Rainforest Lodge (BRL)

Accommodation – good as you might expect for about \$A300 per night plus a few extras, twin share. This price included all the food and some activities. The rooms have fans and most things you would expect given the location (a long way from anywhere), the competition (none), and the cost.

Staff – smiling, and with the exception of the skilled locally sourced guides and a few talented cooks, almost entirely useless. Certainly any staff that populated the various offices that BRL maintain around the country were keen to remove our money, heralding the end of any customer service. It is hard to imagine a more top-heavy business model.

Wildlife and trails – good to excellent. There is not as much “large” wildlife as at Uncle Tan’s Jungle Camp (see below) but the likelihood of seeing something rare is greater. There have been more birds recorded in the valley than anywhere else in Borneo.

The vibe – a shocker. Most of the inmates were rich mega-fauna from the USA or immaculate Japanese who thought they were in Africa. Neither of these groups was any fun to be with. Most had curious expectations of Danum Valley and its wildlife. The sight of

blindingly brightly-coloured tourists sneaking about looking for majestic herds of wildebeest showed just how daft white (or “yellow”) monkeys really are.



Uncle Tan’s Wildlife Camp (UTWC)

Accommodation – better than the \$A10 per night tariff would suggest. This ludicrously low fee included all food, guides and activities in and around the camp. UTWC charges \$A30 each way for the road / river transfer from near Sandakan to the camp. This included wildlife viewing each way and is not excessive given the distances involved. The accommodation consisted of raised open timber and corrugated iron huts with mattresses and mosquito nets. The camp is all less than two years old, replacing the apparently less salubrious version that became part of the river during a flood.

Staff – all staff including Uncle Tan’s son Eugene in the head office in KL are faultlessly helpful. The camp staff did everything to maximise the experience of all their guests. We did not hear a single complaint from anyone during our four night stay.

Wildlife and trails – There are a number of trails marked from the camp. One circles some beautiful ox-bow lakes whilst others penetrate the lowland rainforest. The Kinabatangan River is the real focus for wildlife with many different primates possible, along with a variety of other large mammals that included for us - elephants, otters and a variety of civets. There were many birds – particularly hornbills.



The vibe – awesome. The low cost and the high probability of seeing lots of critters sees many backpackers and young wildlife enthusiasts flock here. I hate intelligent and beautiful young women so I had a rotten time. Particularly after a few beers.

Mt Kinabalu – Sutera Sanctuary Lodges

Accommodation – great if you succeed in booking it in any way. Why these guys have an internet booking site is a complete mystery. There is no known method for booking accommodation here, with their web site claiming they were completely booked out months in advance. Many intending tourists told us they were advised that there was no chance of them getting accommodation but they all appeared to be able to get some by fronting the office with money in hand.

Staff – all the staff came out of the same machine. They were all five feet two inches tall, female or effeminate, recently employed, neatly uniformed and sharing a brain. Trust me, I am not making this up. Any three people chosen at random from a sheltered workshop could have replaced ten of these decorative walking blobs.

Wildlife and trails – pretty good for birds and squirrely things. Not many large mammals. Happily there is only one type of person that visits here – the Mt Kinabalu climber (or failed versions thereof). This means that there is almost nobody on any of the other trails, and they are all good.

The vibe – it depends, but really it was a bit poor. All the folk that had just staggered down the mountain were close to death, whilst those that were going up the next day were one day removed from being close to death. It seems that nobody stays for more than two nights; all others being fixated on walking up and down a very steep hill.

Poring Hot Springs – Sutera Sanctuary Lodges

Accommodation – our self-contained “Tempua Lodge” was great and inexpensive.

Staff - the staff seemed to be able to perform simple tasks simply and without fuss.

Wildlife and trails – lots of birds but limited mammals. The latter have been eaten methinks. The trail system is also rather limited. The obsession that Asians have with waterfalls sees that these are accessible but aside from them and the canopy walkway there are no trails.

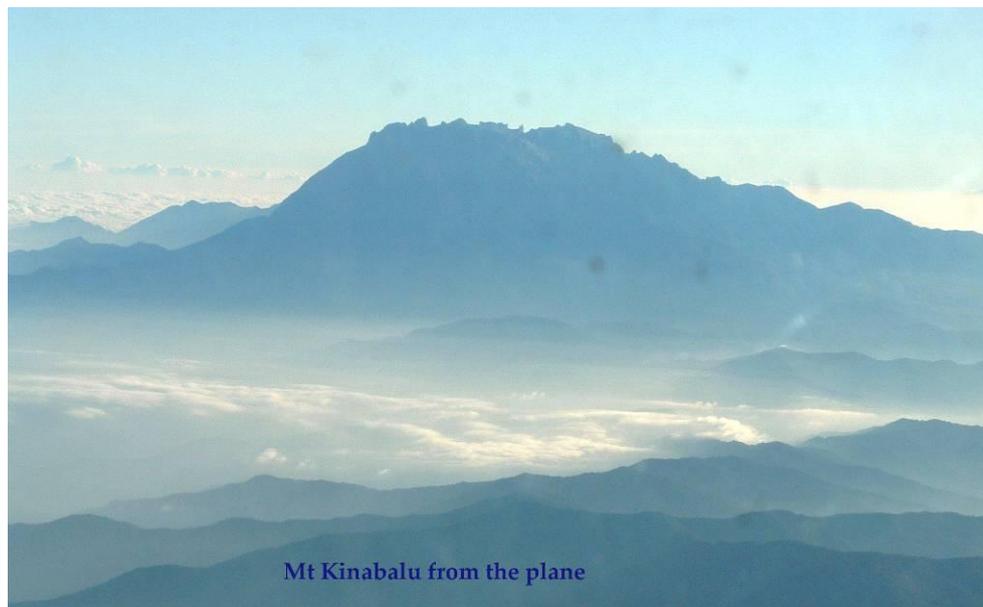
The vibe – Pretty good, as a few metres outside the park are a number of small but good restaurants, and the hot springs attract a range of locals and tourists. I could have spent more time here.

The People of Sabah

We really didn't meet many locals. The people we met were mostly associated with tourism in some way. I got the impression that the other local people were honest and helpful. At no stage did we feel unsafe or unwelcome. There was no obvious disharmony between the local islamic and christian folk. Sabah, like the rest of Malaysia is a very safe destination for women, even those travelling alone. This includes those women that Ted and I met (although this may not always have been the case).

Roads / transport

The roads were okay. Traffic was relatively light and the ludicrously low price of fuel – A24 cents / litre – ensured that transport costs were very low. Long distance buses were modern and comfortable while minivans could be cheaply hired, especially with two or more travelling together.



Weather

Except for Mt Kinabalu, where the temperatures were delightfully mild, it was hottish, about 32° each day, and humid, about 85%. This meant it was fun to think of when this weather was going to stop – like when you got home. It was not possible to wash and dry clothes. If anything they got wetter the longer they hung.

We were very lucky with rain. It rained at some stage almost every day but it always seemed to coincide with lunch or drinks.

Insects

Pathetic. Except for an occasional mozzie, a few pitiful leeches (at Danum Valley), the odd six kilogram scorpion, and the occasional spider that would take out a wombat, the forests were disappointing bereft of interesting biting insects.

Cicadas were another thing entirely. There is a species of cicada or three million that cranked up for every miniscule change in temperature, humidity, cloud cover, time of day or human proximity. There is even an undescribed bastard of a cicada that attacks boats in the Kinabatangan River when the outboard motor achieves a certain number of revs. This particular beast is unfortunately in no danger of extinction and had our driver cowering in fear. I used to like cicadas before I went to Sabah.



Food

It didn't make us sick but there was not too much else to sing its praises.

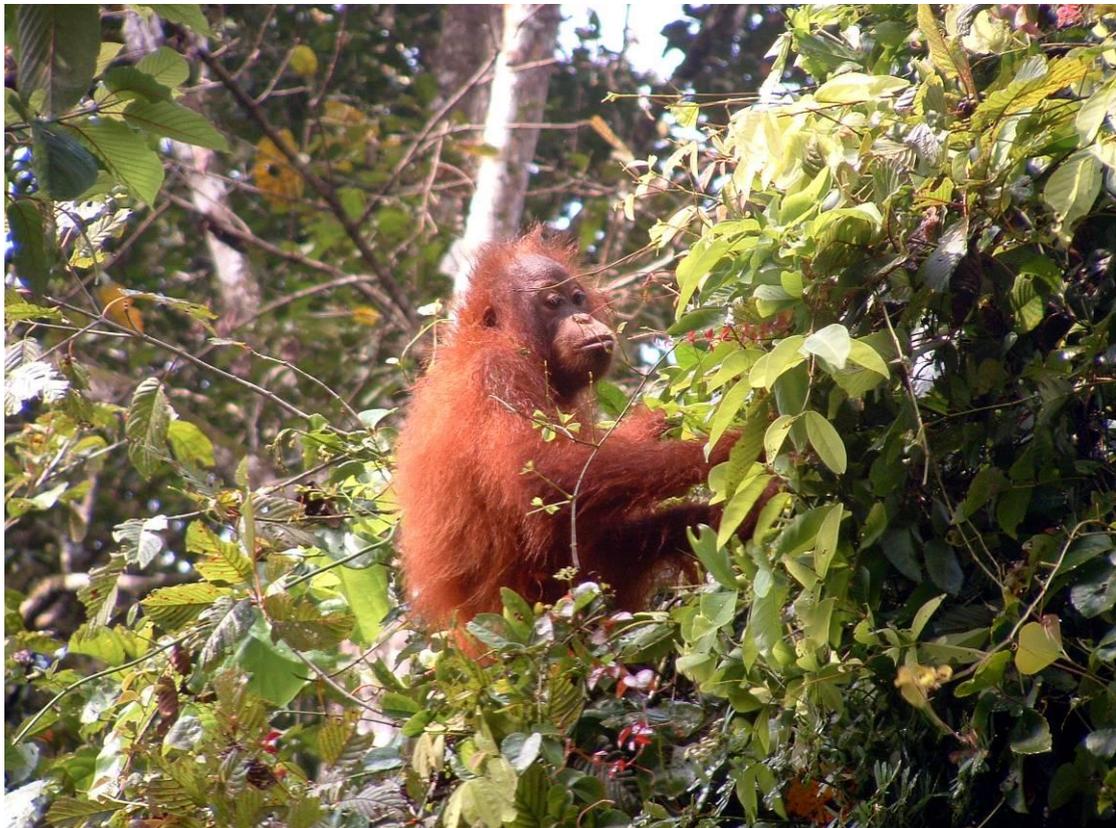
Beer

Very ordinary, relatively expensive, and often unavailable due to a pathetic and unsound religious mis-interpretation of the scriptures.

Wildlife – see lists at end of report

Birds – We managed 220 species including 20 odd endemics (depending on how these things are calculated). We did not have tapes – a serious error in planning – and many key species were breeding and not calling. We had a small tape recorder that allowed a number of birds to be seen that would have otherwise been missed. Nonetheless, we achieved a reasonable list given our short visit. I managed 70 new birds.

Mammals – Everyone that visits Sabah would hope to see wild orang-utans and we managed these at BRL and UTWC. I think that if it wasn't for these we would have been a bit disappointed with our list of 36 mammals as many of these were squirrels and treeshrews. Primates are easy at sites away from cooking pots, but other large mammals require time and luck.



Diary

Day 1 – Thursday 17th March 2005

Our Malaysian Airlines 747-400 left Sydney at 1545. From the perspective of the airline the flight was a success. Had the flight lasted any longer they would eventually have noticed that a smallish child in the seat behind me had being strangled. This rodent thought that the seat in front of him was some kind of computer game. A lasting glare in his direction in combination with a shorter less severe version for his mother seemed to do the trick.

The airport at Kuala Lumpur is similar to many modern airports in that it defies the laws of physics. Most impressive was the driverless monorail that connects terminals. This refugee from an amusement park twists and turns along its rail in what appears to be an overly complicated path – just because it can.

We had a few hours in the terminal in which to attempt some sleep so we sprawled out across some rows of seats. We woke to find ourselves surrounded by people. Luckily too, because our plane for Kota Kinabalu was broken and with no intelligible announcement on the PA everyone trucked off to another part of the airport. Never fall asleep for too long in airports.

Falling asleep for too long was not really possible when we arrived at Kota Kinabalu. Our cunning plan for crashing in a comfortable row of seats for a few hours before our next flight to Lahad Datu evaporated. We followed all the airport signs and personal instructions until we found ourselves out on the street. I have forgotten my schoolboy science Moh's Hardness Scale, but I reckoned that concrete outside airports is about a 10.5.



Day 2 – Friday 18th March 2005

The very reasonably priced \$A40 flight to Lahad Datu on a Fokker F50 took us past Mt Kinabalu (the highest mountain in SE Asia at 4097 metres) and as this was early in the morning you could actually see it. The only other things you could see were the endless palm oil plantations. If there is only one truly evil plant in the world, oil palm would be the one.

We were met at the airport by our Borneo Rainforest Lodge (BRL) guide, a formidable and pleasant chap named Stephen. He hailed from a nearby village, grew up in the jungle, loved the place, and aside from being converted to christianity, seemed reasonably well adjusted. For reasons that would later be apparent, we were quickly hustled into one of the BRL offices to remove all our money before going anywhere near the lodge.



The 70km drive to the lodge took us through a large area of logged forest. Logging trucks were more or less continuous in the other direction. Sad really. I guess if the logged forest was left to regrow then the harm is not complete but does this ever really happen? Only the last 5km held any primary forest. We saw no mammals on the way to the lodge although another group arriving later in the day saw a Sumatran rhino on the road. The people from this group are now buried in the forest.

We were met at the lodge by Patricia, who smiled a lot and took us to our accommodation. We spent the rest of the day getting hot and identifying some of the more common birds on the nearby trails. Stephen joined us late in the afternoon and we started seeing some good birds – including white-fronted falconet (the world's smallest raptor), as well as a start on our mammal list with long-tailed macaque, bearded pig, Prevost's squirrel and lesser and greater mouse deer.

Spotlighting started at 2030 and wielding a torch and two spotlights we managed colugo, black giant flying squirrel, sambar deer, Gould's frogmouth and brown wood-owl.



Took a sleeping pill to ensure some continuous sleep and died.

Day 3 – Saturday 19th March 2005

I was resurrected at 0520 and walked for most of the day. Some great memories with six primates being observed – orangutan, Bornean gibbon, maroon leaf-monkey, pig-tailed and long-tailed macaques and slow loris (during the evening spotlighting). The maroon leaf-monkeys are bizarre in terms of their bright orange colour.

Our bird list was also boosted with chestnut-necklaced partridge, great argus, Wallace's hawk-eagle and Jerdon's baza. No pittas. They were all breeding and not calling we were

told. Others had seen them but at the other end of the forest near the Field Centre. Alas, we were told that a visit there was not possible as there was a shortage of vehicles.

Spotlighting saw me rise to the rank of second-in-command spotlihter. Aside from slow loris, we saw Thomas's and red giant flying squirrels, sambar deer, lesser mouse deer, brown wood-owl and savannah nightjar.

The other tourists were starting to get a bit boring. I wondered their motivation for leaving home.



Day 4 – Sunday 20th March 2005

It was an amazingly hot and humid day that revealed forest secrets very slowly. A blue-headed pitta was the highlight and only after a lot of effort.

A post-lunch solo sojourn along the Jacuzzi Trail was more an exercise in fluid loss than wildlife spotting. Buffy fish-owl, green broadbill and lesser fish-eagle were the only interesting birds.

The spotlighting effort saw my position as 2IC confirmed, this time with a short introduction. I found most things seen but these seemed to be the same animals as the previous night.

Day 5 – Monday 21st March 2005

Stephen arranged to have us driven to the entrance gate to the lodge's concession at the top of the hill early in the morning. I was warned that we could all die from the heat today. A

curious mixture of religion and other superstition had determined that because of an eclipse of some sort the temperature was supposed to reach record levels. Schools had been cancelled for two days and all and sundry were predicting doom and devastation. This is from a country that wanted to be taken seriously.

It turned out to be a cooler day than most as we ticked off a number of good birds. These started with black hornbill, black-headed pitta, Storm's stork (a first for Danum Valley), and red-bearded bee-eater.

The afternoon was less productive and the evening spotlight saw me relegated to tourist, ordinary class, with no spotlight. I found most of the animals anyway – slow loris, Thomas's and red giant flying squirrels, each other, buffy fish-owl, common palm civet, lesser mouse deer, bearded pig and an enormous spider.

Day 6 – Tuesday 22nd March 2005

We were leaving BRL and so were keen to get along the road for a pre-breakfast walk in the hope of seeing a few local rarities before our 1000 departure. We managed dark-throated wren-babbler and great slaty woodpecker before our “special departure” departed.

Now a cautionary note regarding the use of the word “special”. We paid extra to leave earlier than the standard departure. So we didn't think that it was all that special when 13 of us + all our luggage crammed into a small minibus for the long and somewhat boring journey dodging logging trucks on the way back to Lahad Datu.

BRL sponsored our lunch in Lahad Datu before the BRL driver (now off-duty) took us to the Kinabatangan River for our transfer to Uncle Tan's Wildlife Camp (UTWC). Our transfer cost us 80MR, a little less than the 250MR that BRL wanted us to pay.

The rest of the UTWC crowd arrived from Sandakan and we all plonked ourselves in a large motorised canoe for the journey down-river to the camp. We had no idea what to expect.

The boat trip was brilliant with regular squadrons of various hornbills flying across the river. The highlight was a small herd of Bornean pygmy elephants adjacent to the riverbank and being marshalled by Lan, Uncle Tan's “camp captain”. I must say that the animals looked a tad pathetic, but not near as pathetic as they were to look later in the week when several of them turned up shot.

Proboscis monkeys and long-tailed macaques were in plague proportions, while bearded pigs and maroon and silvered leaf-monkeys were reasonably common. A pair of the endangered Storm's stork posed in a tree.

Our arrival at the camp jetty heralded the day's rainfall allocation. We found a sleeping place and settled into a few beers. Lan made us very welcome and deferred to our desires far more than for the other tourists. We didn't complain.

Spotlighting by boat during the evening produced lots of buffy fish-owls, monkeys and crocodiles.

(cat)ch of the day



Day 7 – Wednesday 23rd March 2005

Lan took us upriver to search for otters and birds. Lots of hornbills and a few green pigeons but nothing really exciting. Ted and I later dawdled around the two ox-bow lakes near the camp and added a few birds including maroon-breasted philentoma.

Lunch merged into an extended gasbag with all the bright young backpackers that populated the camp. The other tourists at UTWC were great – no pretensions and very chatty.

The afternoon threw a couple of “lifera” at me with white-bellied woodpecker and blue-winged pitta. I celebrated with a Scapa.



A cruise up the river was significant for one thing. It saw the first documented attack on humans by a swarm of cicadas. They came at us in biblical numbers and refused to go away. Lan was convinced he was enjoying a short-lived starring role in a horror movie and that the difficult-to-catch cicadas were in fact killer bees. He was hiding and navigating the boat simultaneously which meant that we no longer travelled the river by the shortest route. Ted was having a bit each way – he wasn't convinced by either of the attack theories under active development. I couldn't catch one of the bastards so I can't really publish. We escaped.

We had a few drinks before dinner and a few more after that as we entertained the troops, having many laughs and wondering how long it has been since we were twenty years old.

Day 8 – Thursday 24th March 2005

Lan took us for an early morning jaunt downriver to try to reach a swamp favoured by Storm's storks and black bitterns but the water level had dropped to a point that made access too difficult. We backtracked for breakfast.

I wandered about the various trails near the camp and around the rapidly decaying five-year-old state park facilities across the lake. There are some very pretty places to see around UT's.

My afternoon turned to mush. It started with my placing a large hole in my right foot between two of my toes. I drowned it in various poisons and stuck my foot in a shoe. It looked nasty but these things happen to reckless folk like me.

Went to bed without my dinner and thought about a place with plasma television, soft beds, washing that dries and unpunctured feet.

Day 9 – Friday 25th March 2005

Breakfast consisted of a couple of cans of coca-cola - a sure sign that my body, and / or brain, was out of balance.

Jeremy, a young Englishman, was a bit interested in birds and while he and I were chasing crested fireback pheasants and talking about the low numbers of orangutans in this forest (judging by the lack of nests), he sees an orang just above our heads. It was a male about four years old and it didn't give a toss what any of the swelling number of white monkeys did as it went about the important business of eating leaves. For me this was the highlight of the holiday – a very close orangutan that could be watched, photographed and marvelled at.



Ted and I, buoyed with the morning's good luck, proved that it was only that as we trudged about the forest in a fairly fruitless fashion. One good thing came of it – we managed to be back at camp before the rain. This was no ordinary rainstorm – it rained semi-naked women. What happened was this – one of the guides had taken a large group out into the forest to search for bugs or leaves or whatever else is easy to find on a daily basis. His charges, naturally, were busy taking photos, staring at each other and wondering what the occasional large rumbling noises were. In the wash up there were a few digital cameras that lost interest in taking photos, and lots of wet people. The “showers” at UTWC are the weakest link in terms of comfort and amenity so the young wet folk paraded up and down the boardwalk in their undies with soap in hand showering under the gutterless roof. Ted and I took no interest in this – we were busy with our bird lists.

The rain went elsewhere and after many otter-less scans of the lake, I finally nabbed one working close to the far shore. I caught up with Ted as it changed lakes, giving us our opportunity to identify a smooth otter from the confusing range of otters that were possible.

The boat trips in the afternoon and evening threw up silvered leaf-monkey, masked and common palm civets and the usual array of owls and sleeping things. We failed to find any cats. Ted stayed up to see a Malay civet in the camp.



Day 10 – Saturday 26th March 2005

We said goodbye to UTWC around mid-morning. Uncle Tan's was the highlight of the trip for both Ted and I.

The best part of the boat trip upriver was the chance to get some washing dry.

I thought the flight over the palm oil plantations was boring but boring was redefined as driving through same. Such was the journey from the river to Gum Gum, the oddly named

site of UTWC's "operations base". The only relief was being pulled over by the local wallopers for some sort of social chat with our driver about exchange rates, the share price index and the cost of raising families these days.

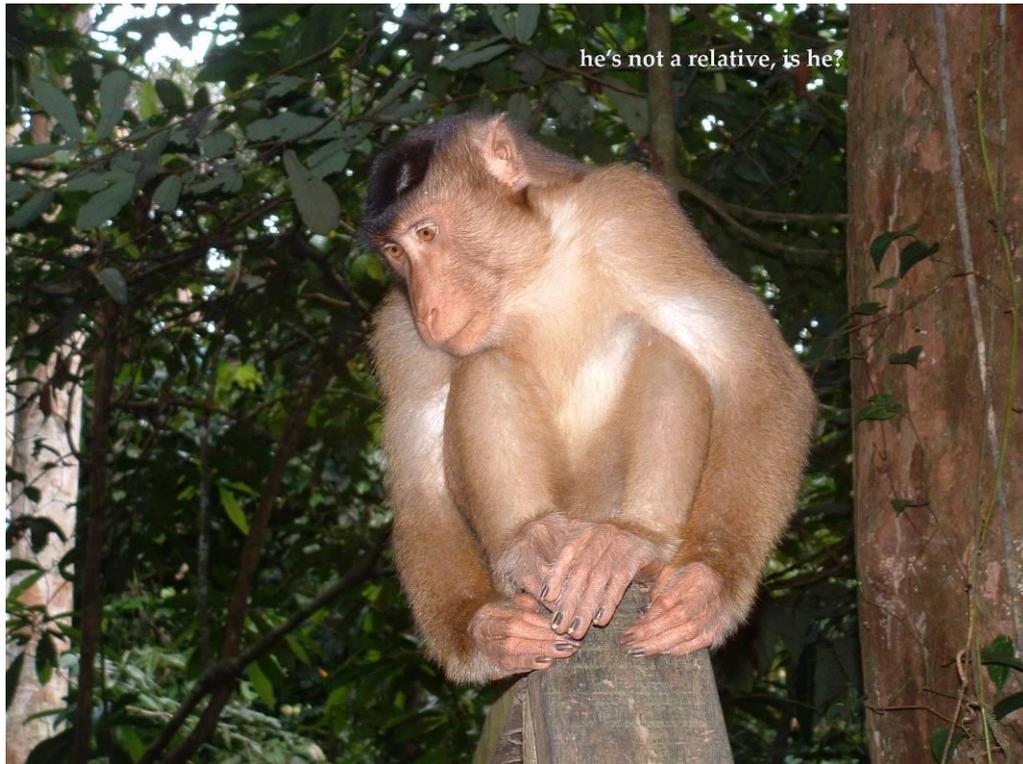
Back at the "ops base", there was a shambolic mass of tourists either coming or going to the camp. It was easy to identify which group was which by the cleanliness of their clothing. We booked for the night in their dorm, luckily the only inmates, and then had a brainwave about visiting the Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre at Sepilok, about 5km away. We were deposited there by an UTWC driver, who promised to return some hours later to retrieve us. He never did.

The experience at Sepilok was enhanced by our meeting a young English lass who was doing some volunteering there. She relayed comments she had received from others (young ladies) regarding us. Apparently we had been assessed as "cool guys".

The orangutan-feeding thing was worth a look, as was the forest.



We waited for our driver to return. When the staff started locking the gates we thought it best to start walking. After a few kilometers we accepted a lift to the main road from a friendly local family who are probably still trying to get the smell out of their car. Here we nabbed a public bus back to Gum Gum before procuring several beers from a nearby shop.



Day 11 – Sunday 27th March 2005

A large yellow air-conditioned bus took us to the UNESCO World Heritage Mt Kinabalu National Park (MK). The journey was cool and comfortable and allowed us to watch the latest Jackie Chan movie.

At MK we checked into the bed-challenged Liwagu Suite. I ended up sleeping on the floor.

After lunching at the Liwagu Restaurant, perhaps the most overstaffed and inefficient eating facility ever discovered, we hit the trails and immediately started ticking off endemic Bornean birds. The best for this post-lunch meander were red-breasted partridge, fruit-hunter and gold-naped barbet. Also had superb views of a pair of Whitehead's pygmy squirrels.

Dinner at the Liwagu was embarrassing. Drinks? No we haven't got that one. Main course? No we haven't got that either. Desert? Ditto. It reminded me of ordering from teahouses in the Himalaya. Don't read the menu, just ask for the one thing they have. The difference was that this restaurant took itself seriously.

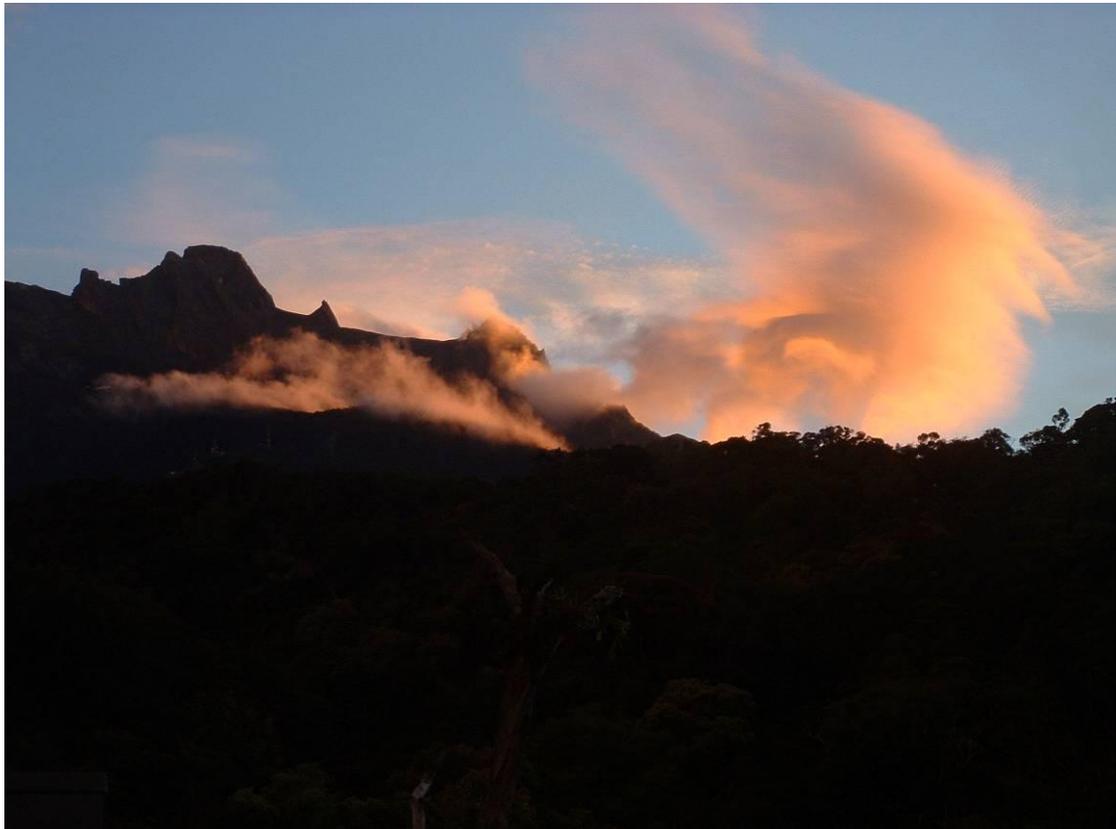
Day 12 – Monday 28th March 2005

We hitched to the top of the Liwagu Trail with high hopes of seeing a long list of interesting stuff. Maroon leaf-monkeys were a surprise, but aside from one Bornean black-banded squirrel and mountain treeshrew no other mammals were seen. New birds were elusive with only mountain tailorbird to add to our lists.

We transferred to the Hill Lodge – very adequate and with two beds! After lunch I did a runner from Ted along the Khao View Trail to try to winkle out some of the shyer critters

put off by the sound of his expensive but noisy boots. Found some “old” favourites in red-breasted partridges and fruit-hunter, and added mountain wren-babbler, smooth-tailed treeshrew and Jentinck’s squirrel.

As the dining opportunities were limited to the comedic Liwagu Restaurant, the only decision to be made was to guess which meals and drinks they actually had.



Day 13 – Tuesday 29th March 2005

Kinabalu squirrel (thanks Ted) made an appearance on a slow morning that only got going as we approached our lodge. On the Silau Silau Trail a mixed flock of large birds were bathing. There were three different laughing-thrushes, short-tailed magpies and squirrels bouncing about. It is simply untrue that I killed Ted here and buried him in a shallow grave.

Another afternoon slothful solo sortie revealed the bird of the trip for me - Whitehead’s broadbill. Wow – what a fabulous bird. It doesn’t make any sense at all. All feathers and no bill.



(picture courtesy of Simon Colenutt)

We were to climb Mt Kinabalu the next day. I was not at all excited about the 1500m ascent to the lodges but I was looking forward to seeing the changes in vegetation.

Day 14 – Wednesday 30th March 2005

Our involuntary contribution to the Sabah Wildlife Authority for our trekking permits will no doubt assist them in continuing to provide modern facilities in the park, and in their fight against poachers. Or maybe not. We hired our compulsory and very friendly guide, Dakin, so that we wouldn't get lost on the most populated trail I have ever seen. Interesting that it would be very possible to expire unseen on any of the other trails, which do not require a guide, but not on the one to the top of the mountain which does.

The climb started at 1860m at the head of the road and ended at Guntung Lagadan Hut at 3300m. It took me four and a half hours for the six kilometer walk, with regular rest and photo stops. Ted ran ahead for reasons best asked of Ted. Every person descending gave me an update of how far Ted was ahead of me. I reminded each of them that I had all the single malt in my pack.

The trail is continuously up. In parts it is very eroded and reminded me of walking along a rocky riverbed except for the angle! Rain, when it came was more of a nuisance than a threat. My trusty two dollar umbrella and a bin liner bag kept me dry. Ted got a bit wet.

The changes in vegetation were fascinating. Many of the plants were familiar with several species of flowering rhododendrons and pitcher plants and a wide variety of orchids. There

were few birds but what was present was abundant, especially the ubiquitous mountain black-eye, along with island and eye-browed thrushes. No mammals excepting many sightings of mountain treeshrews.



The main accommodation also had a restaurant that served very good food and beer at exactly the same price as at the bottom of the hill. We indulged in the last of the Scapa. My eyes became very red with the combination of a tired body, altitude and alcohol. I enjoyed chatting with Maxi, one of the Sutera staff who explained to me that the company was precisely as hopeless as we had understood it to be.

Sleep would have been achieved if I had just had the forethought to try to do it anywhere but in the dormitory. Like up a tree or somewhere.

Day 15 – Thursday 31st March 2005

Ted rose at 0230 and went up the mountain. I wandered slowly down it after a large breakfast. The anticipated Kinabalu friendly warbler continued to avoid me. I enjoyed the slow walk that for most part was less populated than the day before.

Our return to the office heralded the search for our baggage. We had left very clear instructions on three occasions that our bags were to be transferred to the office from our room. Three times the smiling robots nodded. Evidently nodding is not to be taken as a form of understanding or agreement on their part because our bags were where we left them. This was despite my being twice collared by staff on top of the mountain explaining that we had left our bags in our room and that they had been transferred to the office. I muse on whether they could accomplish more complex tasks, like feeding themselves or breeding.



We acquired a French Canadian to join us in our transfer to Poring Hot Springs. We chartered a minibus operated by a friendly and competent chap. Our traps, the “Tempua Lodge” was roomy and comfortable. We were adjacent to the entry point for the hot springs. The Sutera Sanctuary Lodges staff were very helpful and competent. We must have crossed into a parallel universe.

now this is an interesting chunk of fungi



We enjoyed a great meal at a restaurant outside the park.

Day 16 - April Fools' Day

It was a long uphill trek to the Lagandan Waterfall. As waterfalls go, it wasn't too bad in the Asian way of things where waterfalls achieve godlike status. Our walk was not based on getting to the waterfall but tracking down some silly pitta or other. They remained unseen, but others were snared despite the deafening din of cicadas.

A midday deluge preceded a trot around the canopy walkway. A Siberian blue robin or three sat on the path but other than these there was nothing of note. The law of diminishing returns had a tight grip now.

Day 17 – Saturday 2nd April 2005

We picked up a few new birds including the large Bornean spiderhunter on our last poke around prior to leaving for Kota Kinabalu.

Five of us chartered our friendly minivan driver for the trip. It worked out at \$A12 each for service right to the door of our hotels. We stayed at the Hotel Kinabalu @ 60MR per night – a bargain.

Ted, with his fashionably frayed and faded pre-war shorts went hunting books while I stocked up on T-shirts for the family. Finding a place to have a beer was restricted in this largely Moslem town but a grotty Chinese-run taxi drivers' café assisted in my time of need.

Dinner at a Moslem restaurant was superb, all things considered. They had no alcohol and Ted chucked a wobbly when they kindly advised they had ran out of mineral water. I had a great time. Ted got sick later – never order seafood unless you see it gasping in a bucket just before it is cooked.

Day 18 – Sunday 3rd April 2005

At 0310 the wake-up call did its job.

The airport gave us grounds for wondering whether we were going anywhere when their computer died. Some flights were cancelled but ours, to KL, eventually got going.

The KL to Sydney flight went as expected, the highlight being the Aussie reds.



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		DV	UT	MK	PHS	other
Oriental Darter	Anhinga melanogaster		5			
Little Egret	Egretta garzetta		5			
Pacific Reef-Egret	Egretta sacra					16
Great Egret	Ardea alba		5			
Purple Heron	Ardea purpurea		8			
Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	1	5			
Striated Heron	Butorides striatus	2	5			
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Nycticorax nycticorax		5			
Storm's Stork	Ciconia stormi	4	5			
Jerdon's Baza	Aviceda jerdoni	2	6			
Oriental Honey-buzzard	Pernis ptilorhynchus	1				
Brahminy Kite	Haliastur indus		5			
White-bellied Sea-Eagle	Haliaeetus leucogaster		5			
Lesser Fish-Eagle	Ichthyophaga humilis	3	7			
Gray-headed Fish-Eagle	Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus	4				
Crested Serpent-Eagle	Spilornis cheela	1	5			
Black Eagle	Ictinaetus malayensis	3		11		
Wallace's Hawk-Eagle	Spizaetus nanus	2	8			
White-fronted Falconet	Microhierax latifrons	1				
E Red-breasted Partridge	Arborophila hyperythra			10	15	
Chestnut-necklaced Partridge	Arborophila charltonii	2				
Great Argus	Argusianus argus	2				
Crested Fireback	Lophura ignita		8			
Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius		6			
Common Sandpiper	Tringa hypoleucos	3	5			
Little Green-Pigeon	Treron olax	3	5			
Thick-billed Pigeon	Treron curvirostra	2				
Pink-necked Pigeon	Treron vernans		6			
Rock Dove	Columba livia					1
Green Imperial-Pigeon	Ducula aenea	3	5			
Mountain Imperial-Pigeon	Ducula badia			10		
Spotted Dove	Streptopelia chinensis					9
Little Cuckoo-Dove	Macropygia ruficeps				15	
Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot	Loriculus galgulus	1	5		15	
Indian Cuckoo	Cuculus micropterus		8			
Oriental Cuckoo	Cuculus saturatus			10		
Plaintive Cuckoo	Cacomantis merulinus	3				
Drongo Cuckoo	Surniculus lugubris	3	5		15	
Chestnut-bellied Malkoha	Phaenicophaeus sumatranus	1				
Raffles' Malkoha	Phaenicophaeus chlorophaeus	1				
Chestnut-br'sted Malkoha	Phaenicophaeus curvirostris	3			15	
Lesser Coucal	Centropus bengalensis	3	5			
Buffy Fish-Owl	Ketupa ketupu	3	5			
Brown Wood-Owl	Strix leptogrammica	1				
Gould's Frogmouth	Batrachostomus stellatus	1				
Savanna Nightjar	Caprimulgus affinis	2				

		DV	UT	MK	PHS	other
Whiskered Treeswift	Hemiprocne comata	1				
Waterfall Swift	Hydrochous gigas			12		
Glossy Swiftlet	Aerodramus esculenta		5			1
Mossy-nest Swiftlet	Aerodramus salangana		6			
Black-nest Swiftlet	Aerodramus maxima	3				
Edible-nest Swiftlet	Aerodramus fuciphaga				15	
Silver-rumped Needletail	Rhaphidura leucopygialis	1				
Brown-backed Needletail	Hirundapus giganteus	5				
Asian Palm-Swift	Cypsiurus balasiensis				15	
House Swift	Apus nipalensis					16
Red-naped Trogon	Harpactes kasumba	1	6			
Scarlet-rumped Trogon	Harpactes duvaucelii	2	7			
Common Kingfisher	Alcedo atthis		6			
Blue-eared Kingfisher	Alcedo meninting		5			
Blue-banded Kingfisher	Alcedo euryzona	2				
Black-backed Kingfisher	Ceyx erithacus	2				
Stork-billed Kingfisher	Pelargopsis capensis	3	5			
Black-capped Kingfisher	Halcyon pileata		7			
Collared Kingfisher	Todirhamphus chloris	1				
Red-bearded Bee-eater	Nyctyornis amictus	4				
Blue-throated Bee-eater	Merops viridis		5			
Dollarbird	Eurystomus orientalis		5			
Oriental Pied-Hornbill	Anthracoceros albirostris		5		15	
Black Hornbill	Anthracoceros malayanus	4	5			
Rhinoceros Hornbill	Buceros rhinoceros	1				
Bushy-crested Hornbill	Anorrhinus galeritus	3	5			
Wrinkled Hornbill	Aceros corrugatus		6			
Wreathed Hornbill	Aceros undulatus				15	
Gold-whiskered Barbet	Megalaima chrysopogon	4			15	
Red-throated Barbet	Megalaima mystacophanos				15	
E Mountain Barbet	Megalaima monticola				12	
E Golden-naped Barbet	Megalaima pulcherrima				10	
Blue-eared Barbet	Megalaima australis	1	6		15	
Malaysian Honeyguide	Indicator archipelagicus				15	
Rufous Piculet	Sasia abnormis	3				
White-bellied Woodpecker	Dryocopus javensis		6			
Maroon Woodpecker	Blythipicus rubiginosus	4			14	
Buff-rumped Woodpecker	Meiglyptes tristis				15	
Buff-necked Woodpecker	Meiglyptes tukki				14	
Gray-and-buff Woodpecker	Hemicircus concretus		6		14	
Checker-throated Woodpecker	Picus mentalis				11	
Great Slaty Woodpecker	Mulleripicus pulverulentus	5	8			
Black-and-red Broadbill	Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchus	2	6			
Banded Broadbill	Eurylaimus javanicus	1				
Black-and-yellow Broadbill	Eurylaimus ochromalus	1			15	
Green Broadbill	Calyptomena viridis	3				
E Whitehead's Broadbill	Calyptomena whiteheadi				12	

		DV	UT	MK	PHS	other
E Blue-headed Pitta	<i>Pitta baudii</i>	3				
E Black-headed Pitta	<i>Pitta ussheri</i>	4				
Blue-winged Pitta	<i>Pitta moluccensis</i>		6			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1		10		
Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	2	5			
Sunda Cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina larvata</i>			10		
Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus hirundinaceus</i>	2	6		15	
E Fruit-hunter	<i>Chlamydochaera jefferyi</i>			10		
Gray-chinned Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus solaris</i>			13		
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>				16	
Green Iora	<i>Aegithina viridissima</i>	4	6			
Greater Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>	3			14	
Lesser Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cyanopogon</i>	1				
Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>		7		16	
Scaly-breasted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus squamatus</i>				15	
Gray-bellied Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cyaniventris</i>	1				
Flavescent Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus flavescens</i>			13		
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>				15	
Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>	5				
Cream-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>	5				
Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>	1	6		16	
Spectacled Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos</i>				16	
Ochraceous Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus ochraceus</i>			11	15	
Gray-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus bres</i>	1				
Yellow-bellied Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus phaeocephalus</i>	1				
Hairy-backed Bulbul	<i>Tricholestes criniger</i>	4			15	
Streaked Bulbul	<i>Ixos malaccensis</i>				15	
Crow-billed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus annectans</i>			11	15	
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>			10		
Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	4				
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	4			15	
Dark-throated Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthonotus</i>	1				
Black-and-crimson Oriole	<i>Oriolus cruentus</i>			11		
Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	3			15	
Crested Jay	<i>Platylophus galericulatus</i>				15	
Black Magpie	<i>Platysmurus leucopterus</i>	3				
Short-tailed Magpie	<i>Cissa thalassina</i>			10		
E Bornean Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta cinerascens</i>			10	15	
Slender-billed Crow	<i>Corvus enca</i>	2	5			
Siberian Blue Robin	<i>Luscinia cyane</i>				15	
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>			11		
Ferruginous Babbler	<i>Trichastoma bicolor</i>	1	7			
Abbott's Babbler	<i>Malacocincla abbotti</i>		7		16	
Short-tailed Babbler	<i>Malacocincla malaccensis</i>	2				
Black-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum capistratum</i>	2	6			
Sooty-capped Babbler	<i>Malacopteron affine</i>	1				
Scaly-crowned Babbler	<i>Malacopteron cinereum</i>	1	6		15	

		DV	UT	MK	PHS	other	
	Chestnut-backed Scimitar-Bab	Pomatorhinus montanus	3				
E	Black-throated Wren-Babbler	Napothera atrigularis	5				
E	Mountain Wren-Babbler	Napothera crassa			12		
	Gray-throated Babbler	Stachyris nigriceps			10		
	Gray-headed Babbler	Stachyris poliocephala				15	
	Chestnut-winged Babbler	Stachyris erythroptera	3	6			
	Striped Tit-Babbler	Macronous gularis		8			
	Fluffy-backed Tit-Babbler	Macronous ptilosus	4				
	Brown Fulvetta	Alcippe brunneicauda	2			15	
E	Chestnut-crested Yuhina	Yuhina everetti			10		
	White-bellied Yuhina	Yuhina zantholeuca				14	
	Sunda Laughingthrush	Garrulax palliatus			12		
E	Black Laughingthrush	Garrulax lugubris calvus			12		
	Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush	Garrulax mitratus			10		
	White-browed Shrike-Babbler	Pteruthius flaviscapis			11	15	
	Oriental Magpie-Robin	Copsychus saularis				15	1
E	White-crowned Shama	Copsychus stricklandii	1	6		15	
	Rufous-tailed Shama	Trichixos pyrropyga	2				
	White-crowned Forktail	Enicurus leschenaulti	1		11		
	Sunda Whistling-Thrush	Myiophonus glaucinus			11		
	Island Thrush	Turdus poliocephalus			13		
	Eyebrowed Thrush	Turdus obscurus			12		
	Yellow-bellied Warbler	Abroscopus superciliaris				15	
	Mountain Leaf-Warbler	Phylloscopus trivirgatus			10		
	Yellow-breasted Warbler	Seicercus montis			10		
E	Bornean Stubtail	Urosphena whiteheadi			12		
	Sunda Bush-Warbler	Cettia vulcania			12		
	Yellow-bellied Prinia	Prinia flaviventris	2	5			
	Mountain Tailorbird	Orthotomus cuculatus			11		
	Dark-necked Tailorbird	Orthotomus atrogularis	1				
	Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	Orthotomus sericeus				15	
	Ashy Tailorbird	Orthotomus ruficeps		6			
	Chestnut-tailed Jungle-fly	Rhinomyias ruficauda	3				
E	Eyebrowed Jungle-Flycatcher	Rhinomyias gularis			10		
	Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica	1				
	Indigo Flycatcher	Eumyias indigo			10		
	Snowy-browed Flycatcher	Ficedula hyperythra			10		
	Little Pied Flycatcher	Ficedula westermanii			10		
	Pygmy Blue-Flycatcher	Muscicapella hodgsoni			11		
	Grey-headed Flycatcher	Culicicapa ceylonensis			11	15	
	White-tailed Flycatcher	Cyornis concretus				15	
	Bornean Blue-Flycatcher	Cyornis superbus		6			
	Malaysian Blue-Flycatcher	Cyornis turcosus	2	6			
	White-throated Fantail	Rhipidura albicollis			10		
	Pied Fantail	Rhipidura javanica		6			
	Black-naped Monarch	Hypothymis azurea	4	6			
	Asian Paradise-Flycatcher	Terpsiphone paradisi	2				

	DV	UT	MK	PHS	other
Rufous-winged Philentoma <i>Philentoma pyrhopterum</i>	5				
Maroon-breasted Philentoma <i>Philentoma velatum</i>		6			
E Bornean Whistler <i>Pachycephala hypoxantha</i>			10		
White-breasted Woodswallow <i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>					16
Gray Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	3		11		
Common Pipit <i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>		5			
Asian Glossy Starling <i>Aplonis panayensis</i>	1				
Crested Myna <i>Acridotheres cristatellus</i>					1
Hill Myna <i>Gracula religiosa</i>	1				
Plain Sunbird <i>Anthreptes simplex</i>				15	
Plain-throated Sunbird <i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>				15	
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird <i>Anthreptes singalensis</i>	1	6		15	
Purple-naped Sunbird <i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>	1				
Crimson Sunbird <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>		7			
Temminck's sunbird <i>Aethopyga temminckii</i>			10		
Little Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	4	6			
Thick-billed Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera crassirostris</i>	2				
Long-billed Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera robusta</i>	2			15	
Spectacled Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera flavigaster</i>	3			15	
Yellow-eared Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera chrysogenys</i>	1			15	
E Bornean Spiderhunter <i>Arachnothera everetti</i>				16	
Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker <i>Prionochilus xanthopygius</i>	1				
Yellow-vented Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum chrysorrheum</i>	1			16	
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>				15	
Plain Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum concolor</i>				16	
E Black-sided Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum monticolum</i>			11		
Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>		6			
Black-capped White-eye <i>Zosterops atricapillus</i>			10		
Everett's White-eye <i>Zosterops everetti</i>				16	
E Mountain Black-eye <i>Chlorocharis emiliae</i>			13		
Dusky Munia <i>Lonchura fuscans</i>	1			15	
Black-headed Munia <i>Lonchura malacca</i>	1	5			1
Tree Sparrow <i>Passer montanus</i>		5		15	1

4	Seen once only
6	Seen 2-3 times
11	Seen 4 times or more
12	Day of trip first seen
red	New bird for me!

Mammals seen	DV	UT	MK	PHS
slender treeshrew	4			
lesser treeshrew				14
mountain treeshrew			11	
smooth-tailed treeshrew			11	
large treeshrew	2			
large flying-fox	4			
colugo	1			
slow loris	2			
silvered leaf monkey		8		
maroon leaf-monkey	2	5	11	
proboscis monkey		5		
long-tailed macaque	1	5		15
pig-tailed macaque	2	6		
Bornean gibbon	2			
orangutan	2	8		
giant squirrel	2	5		
Kinabalu squirrel			12	
Prevost's squirrel	1			15
Bornean black banded squirrel			11	
plantain squirrel		7		
horse-tailed squirrel		7		
Low's squirrel	3			
Jentink's squirrel			11	
Whitehead's pygmy squirrel			10	
plain pygmy squirrel	2	5		14
black flying squirrel	1			
red giant flying squirrel	2			
Thomas's flying squirrel	2			
smooth otter		8		
Malay civet or tangalung (seen by Ted)		8		
masked palm civet		8		
common palm civet	4	5		
Asian elephant		5		
bearded pig	1	5		
lesser mouse deer	1			
greater mouse deer	1			
sambar deer	1			

2	Seen once only
3	Seen 2-3 times
10	Seen 4 times or more
12	Day of trip first seen
red	New mammal for me!