

Sulawesi 3rd – 14 October 2014

Of late there have been quite a few trip reports from northern Sulawesi and I did not expect to be able to contribute with anything new so I was not sure it would warrant even a new trip report. But it turned out to be quite a nice tour with a few new species, so here is the story.

Indonesia is not the easiest place on earth to organize a mammal watching tour. In my naivety I decided to give it a go to do it independently, but ended up with, well, "Bobby" Lambaihang (macaca_nigra@yahoo.co.id) which was a good choice and I will go with him again. The travel agencies in Manado I seem not to be very equipped organizing specialty tours. One of the biggest, Safari Tours, which claimed they could organize the Babirusa tour for me, did not know what they were talking about. I was told the car drive to Nantu is about 7-8 hours' drive from Manado, which would mean that the Nantu Forest would be somewhere between Manado and Gorontalo, which it is not.

Tangkoko National Park

I booked transport with Safari Tours to Tangkoko which was overly expensive, but I was just wanted to get out of Manado with as little hassle as possible. I stayed in Bobby's Tangkoko Lodge which is highly recommended with nice with clean rooms, good food, cold beer and good organizing capabilities. I walked with Bobby and with his assistant URI, both recommendable. The mammals I saw in were the same as everyone else. In a couple of days they should all be easy to find, but as I was filming, I spend a bit more time to get some good footage. On the first night I was lucky enough to be alone with a family of 4 **Spectral Tarsier** with a baby, which is unusual for this time of the year. A better baby time is in May and June. On the other nights I went looking for them we were up to 20 people, and this is not even the high season. On the way to the Tarsier the first afternoon Bobby showed me 3 **Bear Cuscus's** and I would see them on several occasions even without particularly looking for them.



The 2 biggest groups of the endemic **Black Macaques**, Rambo 1 and 2 are easily seen. The tours began at around 5:15 after a fast cup of coffee to see them climbing down from the canopy sometime around 5:30-6am. I thought it could not be possible to miss them but met one who did. I wanted to see them on the beach, but they always walked in the other direction but were great to follow them through the forest for a few hours alone.



2 species of squirrels, **Celebes Dwarf Squirrel** and **Whitish Dwarf Squirrel**, were easily seen and I saw them every time I walked in the forest. **Celebes Rousette** (at least I believe it is this species, but I may be wrong) seems to be easy to find in the hollow fig trees. Bobby and Uri know where to find them.

On the last morning Bobby arranged a fisherman from the village by Tangkoko, to take me out to look for **Spinner Dolphins** and **Pilot Whales**, both apparently easily spotted. I was not disappointed. The school of Dolphins must have numbered in their hundreds. Their acrobatics were just mind-blowing. For me however, maybe the nicest experience in Tangkoko, was the pod of 8-9 Pilot Whales. My last experience with them was a big male swimming under the boat and breaking the surface not 5 meters from us. Due to high waves, this activity can usually only be done from about May to November due to high waves according to Bobby.

Siau Island



Already on the first day in Tangkoko I began to pester Bobby about Siau Island and the **Siau Island Tarsier** which was described in 2008. He knew a few people on the island there and would ask them to look for them. Each evening I asked if he had got positive news. Each evening he had. After a few days of scuba diving in Indonesia's critter capital, Straight of Lembah, Bobby picked me up at the harbor for the 2 hour drive back to Manado. After one night in the overly expensive and run down Celebes hotel close to the harbor, we boarded a speed boat for the 4 hour journey to Siau Island, which is a small rainforest covered volcanic island with some very much active volcanoes halfway to the Philippines. Neptune was nice to me and the ocean was flat on the way there. On the way back less and after an hour or so they began to distribute throw-up bags. I imagine that this can also only be done securely a certain time of the year. Bobby can give you more information on this.

Bobby's 2 colleagues met us at the harbor and took us to the excellent Jakarta Hotel. Early afternoon we drove off on Vespas with me on the back. They drove at high speed on the curvy hilly roads with a lot of traffic and with no helmet. I did not feel very comfortable. That he was texting while driving did not help either.

The Tarsier's were easy to find and the walk was relatively easy. On the first night we found 1 and on the second 3. They were a bit more cooperative than their Tangkoko relatives. They climbed the trees and lianas slowly so I had plenty of time getting some good footage and they did not seem to be bothered by my presence. I tried to

make a few photos also, but as you can see, I still have a long way to go to get good shots and filming is anyway more important. The second night was particular nice. Not 3 meters from me on eye level one Tarsier climbed the branch slowly, stopped, looking around, reached out his tiny hand and got himself a juicy cricket. This was a great scene to film. Or, it would have been if I had not forgotten to push the rec button. I will kick myself for a long time for that lapse. While I was hunting Tarsier's one guide went looking for **Dwarf Cuscus** which they had heard. It did not take long for him to find one. Unfortunately it was rather steep and bushy, so I had to pack my camera. When I came to the tree he was in he was not far from me and not very high. By the time I had unpacked the camera he was further up and I only got a small furry Cuscus ass on tape.



I was the only western tourist on the island and sitting in a restaurant the owner came to me and asked what I was doing there. Looking for Tarsier and Cuscus, I replied. Tarsier he had not heard about, but Cuscus, there were too many of them according to him, so they may be easy in general to see there.

On the island they are understandingly not used to people like us and on Saturday morning while waiting for the ferry, they said something about a Civet which should not be too difficult to find also. It never occurred to them that I would like to see that too, which was a shame. Next time on Sulawesi I will for sure go back to Siau. It is a very nice place with very friendly people and some great wildlife.

All the best

Torbjörn Lundqvist