

AN UNUSUAL CIVET. BORNEO (SABAH). APRIL 2024.

During a recent highly successful trip to Borneo (Sabah) during April 2024 a rather unusual Civet was sighted. The sighting took place during a routine extended night drive at Tabin Wildlife Reserve, around 5km from the lodge heading out of the reserve on the main track at 23.10 on the 16th April, in secondary rainforest habitat adjacent to the vast palm oil plantation. I am far from an expert on the fauna of the region, but the Civet morphologically looked very different to the other species of Civet we had seen regularly on the trip. So, it was recorded in my notes as Civet sp?

As this location has been visited extensively by mammal enthusiasts I would be very interested in suggestions with regard to an accurate ID of this specimen.

Images A, B and C were taken by me during the observation.



Initially when only its face was visible, I thought it was a Masked Palm Civet which are found in Tabin, but when the body came into view, the body was various shades of grey and black not the usual rufous colour and the tail tip was not white, which is usual in most Masked Palm Civets, but not all. It appeared to be foraging for insects, we observed it for around 15 minutes, our guides at the time were reluctant to suggest a definite ID.



Correspondence with Mike Gordon (MG) our superb guide during the earlier part of the trip, added an additional image (Image D) to the debate which I am assuming was also taken at the same time as my images by our guide and sent to him (MG) and is of the same animal.

D



Emails from MG went something like this:

“*** said you saw a possible hybrid civet; I’ve seen photos of it, it is pretty weird”.**

“I saw someone else’s photos; it looks like a cross between an Island and a Masked. Big enough to be Masked, but colour of an Island”.

“Yours looks like a Striped Palm Civet, it looks weird but got the long tail and slender body”.

So, some slight confusion, are all the images of the same animal?, I personally think they are.

Some questions:

Do different civet sp. hybridise? Can they hybridise?

Is this sighting of an unusual colour morph of the Striped Palm Civet as suggested by MG?

My wife who possibly got the best view of its full body particularly the back as it climbed upwards observed it was very dark down the spine area (black) and extensively grey on the flanks with no visible patterning.

At some stage in the future, I will publish a species list and short trip report as our visit was outside the usual calendar and may help with trip planning.

I look forward to the views of fellow mammal watchers on this unusual Civet sighting.

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