

Indonesia, September 2024



Indonesia is the second most biodiverse country in the world, exceeded only by Brazil. I first visited in 1995 and was blown away by the range of wildlife, people, languages, and landscapes. So I'm not really sure why it took me until last year to visit again on a trip to Sulawesi and West Papua. Earlier positive impressions of the country were reinforced and I decided to do another trip there this September, concentrating on the Mentawai Islands and Sumatra, with a few days in Java thrown in for good measure.

The trip got off to an inauspicious start. I was visiting my daughter in Vancouver and got a notification that my flight, scheduled to leave in four and a half hours, had been cancelled and I was being re-booked on a flight 12 hours later, which would not allow me to connect with the domestic flight and Mentawai ferry I needed to catch. I headed to the airport to receive the same news, except now the rebooked flight would be 14 hours later. The woman on the line for Air Canada could probably detect the rising sense of panic in my voice and re-booked me on a flight to Jakarta via Taipei, which left only one hour after the originally scheduled flight and arrived in Jakarta at essentially the same time as initially planned. My palpitations eased somewhat. While waiting in the airport there was an altercation at the gate for the Cathay Pacific flight to Hong Kong, the other flight leaving for east Asia that night, so I guess there were lots of unhappy passengers around.

The flights to Taipei and on to Jakarta were uneventful, and a premium seat on the Taipei-Jakarta leg raised my spirits. Immigration in Jakarta was unremarkable apart from the fact that most of my proffered

American bills to pay for the visa-on-arrival were deemed unacceptable due to tears which looked near-microscopic to me. Indonesian bills, even if appearing to have been previously used to wipe one's rear, were accepted without question, but I didn't have any Indonesian money. Eventually I was able to find a few US dollar bills that passed scrutiny and was allowed into the country. There were signs asking passengers to download a QR code and complete a health questionnaire, but I couldn't find anyone in the airport who was the least bit interested in seeing the completed form.

After flying with Garuda to Padang, I arrived at Yani Homestay to meet up with Paul Carter, who had flown in from Thailand, and Arif Setiawan, known generally as Wawan. Wawan is the founder and director of SwaraOwa ("Gibbon Voice"), an Indonesian organization devoted to primate conservation in Indonesia through initiatives such as encouraging farmers to conserve trees for shade-grown coffee production and had organized the Siberut portion of the trip for us. He proved to be tirelessly enthusiastic and inspiring.

After a noisy night at Yani's, Paul and I headed down to the Mentawai Fast Ferry port for the 7:00 am ferry across to Siberut to join the crowd of locals and foreigners already there. Paul and I were the only tourists not sporting tattoos, but we were allowed on the ferry anyway. The first mammals of the trip consisted of a couple of pods of small, dark dolphins, likely Pantropical Spotted Dolphins. We arrived in the port on south Siberut at about 2:00 pm and met our team for the next few days – Ismael, Vincent and Frankie. We hopped on motorcycles for the short trip to Puro, the village where Ismael and Vincent live, where we had a fried fish lunch while we waited for the tide to rise. At about 4:00 pm, we left on a long narrow motorized canoe down a river, then turned onto a side tributary that was still quite shallow, necessitating Vincent to hop in and out of the boat a few times to get it through the shallow spots. The tributary opened up into a wide estuary and we arrived in Toloulaggo village a couple of hours later, just as the rain was starting. Paul and I were put up in a house in the village a short walk from the beach and served a supper of fried fish, egg, rice and veggies.

About 7:00 pm we headed out for a night walk in the plantations and secondary forest surrounding the village. We found a total of 6 or 8 Siberut Flying Squirrels, a couple of *Rattus* – type rats, and a Siberut Langur resting up in a tree. We also found a Siberut Scops Owl, the only bird endemic to the islands, whose picture appears above. It started to rain about 9:30 pm, so we called it a night and headed back.



The next morning, we left about 6:00 am. We found a small colony of Short-nosed Fruit Bats under the fronds of a coconut palm, several Lago/Mentawai Squirrels and a smaller Fraternal Squirrel, as well as a small group of Siberut Langurs. Eventually we were able to hear the calls of Kloss's Gibbons and see them from a nearby hillside, before heading back for a swim in the ocean and fresh crab for lunch. We also had the opportunity to watch some of the kids in the village practice their surfing.



That evening, we hiked out at about 5:00 pm and found a couple of Mentawai/ Golden-bellied Treeshrews/Tupai in the plantation bordering the village. At dusk, small bats, likely Asian Whiskered Myotis, were flying around. After nightfall we found three different species of rats, the Mentawai Long-tailed Giant Rat, Mentawai Archipelago Rat and a *Maxomys* rat. We also came across a slightly smaller flying squirrel than those seen the previous night, with a lighter-gray back and a white belly, feeding on sap. While watching the flying squirrel, I noticed some eye shine from a larger creature, which turned out to be a Philippine Palm Civet of the Mentawai subspecies. We saw a couple more flying squirrels, a Black-headed Cat Snake and some bats feeding on fruit on a tree in town, likely *Macroglossus sobrinus*, and then headed back for a dinner of fish and chili and a relatively early night.





September is the end of the dry season in most of Sumatra. However, the west is perhaps wetter than the east, and we had rain much of the night. After a breakfast of crepes with chocolate sauce we headed out under an overcast sky. We saw tupai and both of the diurnal squirrels from yesterday and a large rat in some palm fronds just on the edge of the village. The rain started after about an hour, but we kept hiking hoping it would diminish. It didn't, to the point that we took shelter under a thatched palapa eating biscuits and sugar cane for an hour, then headed back to the village thoroughly soaked. A walk around the village after lunch produced a bat under a coconut palm. Entertainment was provided by kids surfing on the beach in town, including one who had a couple of spectacular wipe-outs. We left again about 6:00 pm and soon found a couple of tupai and a number of the larger flying squirrels seen previously. Paul was feeling unwell and headed back early. I continued on and found a smaller dark grey flying squirrel with a bushy dark tail tipped in white, probably the same species seen the previous night, although I hadn't noticed the white tip to the tail at that time. The only flying squirrel with this appearance in the area is the Sipora Flying Squirrel, a species that doesn't appear to have been confirmed as occurring on Siberut Island. I have included pictures, below. If anyone has an alternate identification, I would love to hear it.





The next morning, we were hiking up the road out of town when a tupai scurried across the road, followed by a Mentawai Ground Squirrel, much smaller than the tupai. We took a trail into taller forest on a steep hillside. Paul asked if we were continuing in a loop or returning the way we came. The answer was that the route ahead was too tough and we would have to return the way we came, but in fact we continued ahead anyway. We found a group of gibbons and then two Mentawai Pig-tailed Langurs, one each of both the dark and pale colour morphs. We were able to watch the gibbons for a while, then continued on the increasingly slippery and steep trail back to the village for a quick dip in the ocean, whose temperature was almost identical to the temperature of the sweat in which I was awash, but felt great, nonetheless. On our evening walk we returned to the tree where I had seen the smaller flying squirrel the previous night and were able to locate it again for further photos. Paul managed to get a great photo of the Mentawai Long-tailed Giant Rat seen previously, included below. Red-legged Crake, a frogmouth and a stunning kingfisher were highlights of the evening.





The next morning's walk produced a Lago Squirrel and a couple of shy Mentawai Ground Squirrels. I hiked with Ismael and Frankie into an area of forest where they had previously seen Siberut Macaques but found no sign of them, although we did hear gibbons again. We had a relaxing afternoon hanging out on the porch of a house close to the water to catch the breeze. I reflected on the fact that Indonesian males appear to divide into two groups, those who smoke and those who will start smoking once they are weaned. A heavy rain later in the afternoon made for a muddy night hike, during which we saw a Philippine Palm Civet again as well as previously seen flying squirrels.



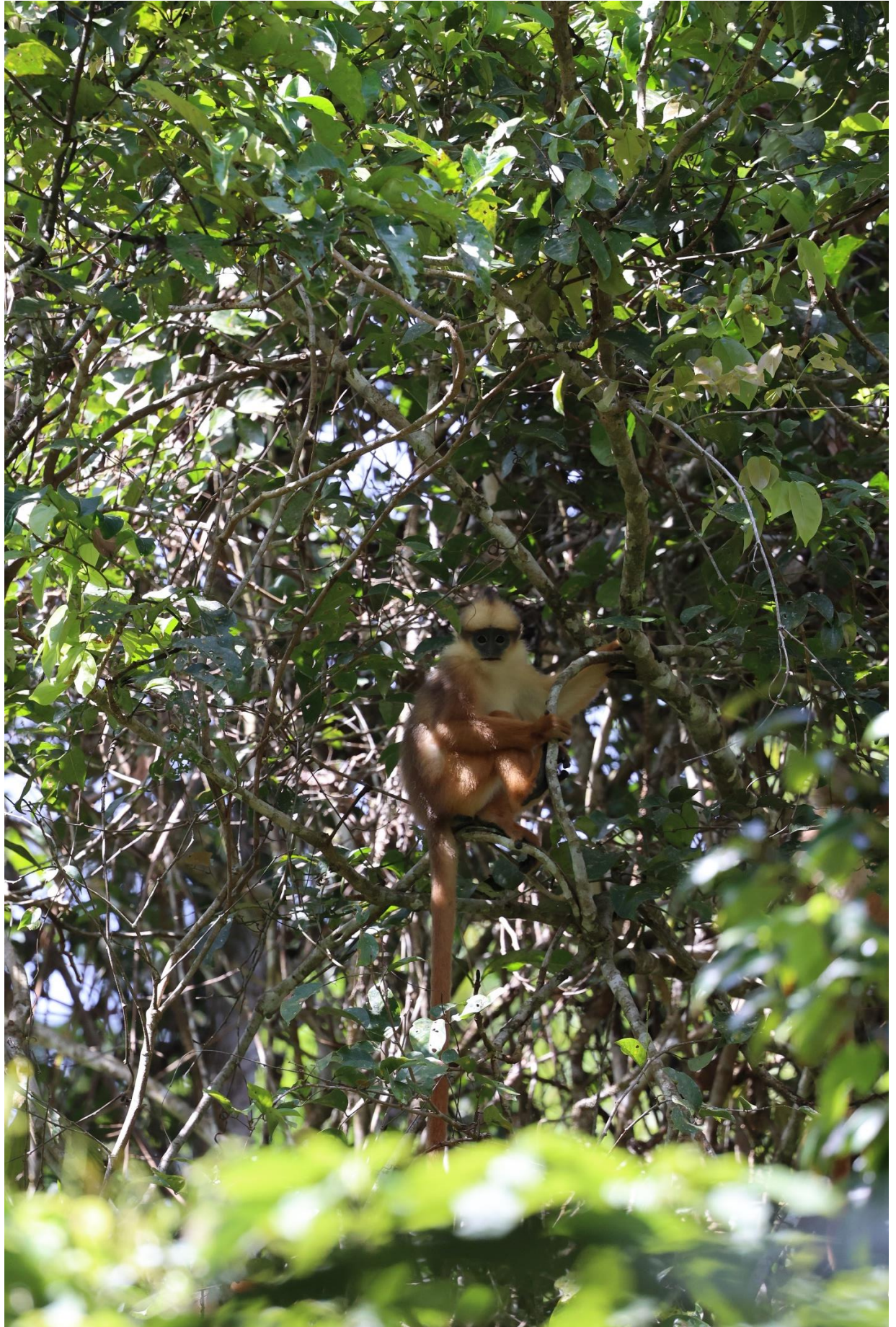
It was raining heavily the following morning as we packed up and walked through the village to a sheltered spot where we could board the motorized canoe to return to Puro village. The rain continued throughout the ride. Back in Puro we had a lunch of fried fish and chili sauce, then set off for the ferry port, this time in the covered back of a truck rather than on motorcycles thankfully. The ferry ride was uneventful and we again saw a pod of likely Pantropical Spotted Dolphins. In Padang we went out for dinner at Safari Garden, enjoying the ability to order off a menu, and then back to Sentosa Lodge for the best sleep of the trip so far.

After saying good-bye to Paul in the morning I left for Lempur village in Kerinci by shared van. The van arrived about 10:00 am, then spent 3 hours driving around the Padang area picking up passengers before heading south. About 20 kilometres south of Padang the road started to climb through some forested hills and I saw the first Southern Pig-tailed Macaques of the trip. At 2:00 pm I saw a sign for “Sungai Penuh, 139 km” and thought, “oh good, we’ll be early”. I still manage to surprise myself with my naivete. At nightfall we were passing through a larger town and were treated to the sight of Large Flying Foxes streaming out of their roosts to forage for the night. We arrived in Sungai Penuh about 9:00 pm and drove around delivering passengers before continuing on to Lempur village. After changing a flat tire we arrived at Zacky’s Homestay at about 10:00 pm. Food service was done for the day, so I ate a couple of granola bars, waited for the call to prayer from the local mosque to end and went to bed.

The adhan at the village mosque started about 4:00 am, which felt a bit early after the long drive the previous day. After an omelet breakfast I met my guides for the four-day hike, Gilang and Naufal, as well as Zacky Zaid, the owner of the homestay. Zacky was born in Lempur, then moved with his parents to

Kuala Lumpur where he trained as an electrician before moving back and building the guesthouse in 2017-2018, in hindsight an unfortunate time to be starting a tourist-oriented business. He is unfailingly positive and a wealth of local information. A photo of a tiger in the dining area was taken by him a couple of years ago on Lintang Ridge, the area where we would be hiking.

After a short drive to the park entrance, we signed in and started walking. Almost immediately there was a commotion up in the trees and a group of 10 or 12 Sumatran Surili came into view. We stopped for a lunch of fried chicken at about 11:45 and then arrived at the night's campsite at 1:50 pm, a shorter day than I had been expecting. It started raining just before we reached camp, but Gilang and Naufal were exceptionally adroit with tarp and tent set up and we managed to get under cover without getting too drenched. During the hike, we saw a small squirrel, which appeared to be a Slender Squirrel, and heard Siamangs but didn't see them. After the rain eased I went for a walk with Naufal and Patrick, an Irish/Spanish chap hiking with his partner who had set up camp nearby. The trail was wet and muddy, but we saw more Sumatran Surili, a Common Palm Civet and another Slender Squirrel. Back at camp, the Surilis were settling for the night in a nearby tree and a Plantain Squirrel was active high in a tree overhead. A night hike produced more Surilis and a Small-toothed Palm Civet, whose disappearing back appears in the photo below, as well as lots of spiders and other arthropods.





I awoke a number of times during the night - the sleeping bag was sized for Indonesians and clearly not 6'3" foreigners and the night was cool. After a breakfast of gado-gado we started hiking higher. I saw several additional Slender Squirrels and, at the day's lunch stop, a trogon and several broadbills, treepies and barbets. The rain started up shortly afterwards and the leeches emerged in force. I have hiked in places with lots of leeches in the past. I have never hiked anywhere with as many leeches as Lintang Ridge in Kerinci. Gilang told me they are scouting for new camping places due to the number of leeches here, a comment that didn't help me feel better. I even discovered three additional leeches on me within the assumed safety of the tent, then noticed there were a number of small holes perfect for leeches to gain entry. Going down to a nearby stream to bathe I picked up more leeches, somewhat negating the effects of a wash. As a walk was unlikely to be productive, I placed some rice outside the tent and contented myself with observing that. After dark a rat appeared which quickly fled when the light was turned on, but came back enough times that I was able to get some poor photos. Looking at [All the Mammals of the World](#), it appears most likely to be a Rajah Sundaic Spiny Rat, *Maxomys rajah*, but I'm happy to be corrected if someone knows more about this genus than I do. Tiny no-see-ums were entering the tent in droves, so I limited time opening the door in the vain hopes of controlling them. I fell asleep for a few hours and awoke with a strange sensation on my arm. A leech had attached itself to my left antecubital fossa, which didn't make getting back to sleep any easier.



At 6:00 am the next morning it was still raining, although more lightly than before, making for 14 hours of continuous rain. I hoped most of the leeches had drowned overnight. We left after a breakfast of Padang-style noodles, by which time the rain had stopped. We arrived at Lake Kaco about 11:30. It is an extraordinarily beautiful lake – spring-fed, with a deep blue colour and scores of fish. Gilang and Naufal suggested we camp here, but, not being as tough as them, I suggested we return to Lempur village. It felt a bit wimpy ending the hike a day early and if we were seeing Sumatran Rhinos and Golden Cats I would have persevered, but given the conditions and the paucity of wildlife sightings I was okay with heading back. We left after lunch, seeing some Sumatran Surili and Slender and Plantain Squirrels on the way, and were back at the park entrance by 4:30. A warm dry bed at Zacky's Homestay felt particularly welcoming.



The van for the return trip to Padang arrived about 10:00 am. Despite a small landslide that was being cleared on the road we made reasonable time and I was back at Sentosa Lodge at 8:30 that evening for a brief sleep.

I gave myself so much time that I arrived at the airport at 5:50 before check-in was open, which always feels wrong when it comes at the expense of sleep. The flight to Jakarta and then on to Bandar Lampung was uneventful. I found a taxi to drive me to Way Kambas for 450 000 rupiah, which seemed like a good deal for a two-hour drive. After a slight overshoot into the park, we arrived at Satwa Elephant Ecolodge by 4:00 pm.

I had e-mailed Satwa back in the summer indicating that I was interested in seeing mammals. The proposed itinerary from Satwa in response included bathing captive elephants and was so strange I re-read my initial e-mail to check if I had been in a fugue state when I wrote it. I assume someone saw the word "mammal" and came up with as many mammal-adjacent activities as possible. I wrote back that I would like to discuss when I arrived and fortunately this worked out well. I was the only guest at Satwa and Hari, the main guide there and frequently mentioned on this site, was summoned and came over to discuss plans. We decided on an evening walk outside the park that night, then two full days inside the park with a vehicle and driver, mixing walking and driving. The noisy boat referred to in other reports hasn't yet been replaced and Hari stated that he had seen little of note from it over the past few months, so we decided to forgo the use of it.

The first mammal of this phase of the trip was a Sumatran/Greater Tupai, which ran across the veranda of my cabin. Dinner consisted of fried fish and veggies with rice with banana fritters for dessert. We left about 7:30 pm and quickly saw some Short-nosed Fruit Bats on a fruiting tree on the Satwa grounds. This was followed by a Polynesian Rat in a garden, a *Niviventer* and a *Leopoldamys* on vegetation and two Sumatran Slow Lorises, one high in a tree, the other a bit lower down. We arrived back at the lodge and a comfy bed about 10:00 pm. Satwa feels expensive in comparison to many places in Indonesia but is a great place to stay and very reasonable by international standards. There are a couple of homestays in the village which I'm sure are cheaper, but staying there would entail finding a vehicle and negotiating with the park authorities for night-time access which would require more fluency in Bahasa than I possess.



I was up at 4:00 am and we departed shortly thereafter in an open-backed jeep from the lodge. After picking up the obligatory park warden/guide, we drove a short distance into the park and then got out to look for tarsiers in an area where they had recently been sighted. We saw no tarsiers but did see another *Niviventer* and then a Southern Red Muntjac by the side of the road. Back in the jeep we came across a pair of Southern Pig-tailed Macaques in a tree, another muntjac and a single Wild Pig. We heard Agile Gibbons calling but were unable to see them. At the turn-off to the rhino centre, we got out of the jeep and continued on foot to a large fruiting tree. A number of Siamangs were feeding in the tree, in addition to Prevost's Squirrels and at least one Long-tailed Macaque. Back in the jeep we continued along the road to Way Kanan and saw soon afterwards saw Silvered Langurs followed by a Greater Mousedeer and some Sumatran Surili/Mitred Langurs.



At Way Kanan we stopped to take photos of the Short-nosed Fruit Bats roosting under the entrance sign, surely some of the most photographed bats in all of Asia. We also took photos of the False Vampire Bats in the abandoned building there. I had asked about staying at the Way Kanan Guesthouse, but it is currently closed and there don't appear to be firm plans to re-open it. The wardens reported that they had seen a tapir a couple of nights previously.



On the way back, we stopped to check some culverts and found Small Disc Roundleaf Bats as well as a number of bats which I think are again False Vampire Bats, but appeared somewhat differently coloured, likely due to the difference in lighting. I have included a photo, below. Two Plantain Squirrels and another Prevost's Squirrel were seen and then a Three-striped Ground Squirrel ran across the road. We were back at the lodge about 11:20 am for a lunch of soup, fried shrimp and veggies, with papaya and pitahaya for dessert.



We went back out about 4:00 pm and saw several previously-seen species while we searched for a Black-eared Pygmy Squirrel which we could hear but not see. Hari found a 2.5-metre-long snake, likely a rat snake of the genus *Ptyas*, which performed an impressive threat display down by the river, a good reminder to watch where one was stepping. We ate dinner near one of the ranger posts while waiting for night to fall, then started searching the vines for the Pen-tailed Treeshrews reported by the rangers. We saw two in the vines over the road and another a little further along the road, all of which were moving so quickly that photography was impossible. Continuing by vehicle, we saw at least three muntjacs and a couple of Greater Mousedeer, a Sunda Colugo, two Red Giant Flying Squirrels and a palm civet so high in a tree that identification to the species level was impossible. The highlight of the night came less than one kilometre from Way Kanan when Hari's partner suddenly said "cat". Eyeshine was visible just behind a fallen tree, then the cat turned briefly revealing its gorgeous coat pattern before disappearing into the underbrush. My first ever sighting of a Marbled Cat! I arrived back at Satwa about 11:00 pm, well-pleased with the day's sightings and so excited I found it difficult to sleep.



The next morning we followed the same agenda – departure at 4:30 am, fruitless search for tarsiers and then a drive/walk down the main road. We saw muntjac and Greater Mousedeer and around 5:20 am started hearing the Agile Gibbons calling. We picked a spot on the road where the calls seemed loudest and started hiking into the forest. Hari suddenly motioned for me to turn back. He had noticed a small fire and bags and containers holding live birds – an active poachers' campsite. We walked quickly back to

the road and drove to the nearest wardens' post. While they were assembling the team, I saw a Black-banded Squirrel, Plantain Squirrels, a Black Giant Squirrel and several Prevost's Squirrels in the large trees near the post. Some guards from the rhino protection unit arrived to bolster the warden contingent. In contrast to what I assume would happen in Canada, I was invited to go in with the team, staying in the back. The wardens surprised the poachers, who were able to run off and get away. We found numerous birds in the capture bags, including drongos, leafbirds, sunbirds and fairy bluebirds, and a collection of nets and sticky gum for trapping them. The camp was located next to some large puddles, which must have acted as an oasis at the end of the dry season, drawing birds in for a drink where they could be captured.



We went back to the ranger post for breakfast while the birds were inventoried and moved into a large cage prior to release. Hari and I managed to get a look at a Lesser Treeshrew in a vine-covered tree. We continued our drive, again coming across Sumatran Surili, Long-tailed Macaques and a Three-striped Ground Squirrel. We stopped to examine a muddy area near a small pond and found the tracks of tapir, sun bear and a small cat. After a break at Way Kanan we headed back to Satwa, seeing a Cream-coloured Giant Squirrel on the way.

After another delicious lunch at Satwa we headed out again at 4:00 pm. We stopped at the first bridge and this time managed to see two Black-eared Pygmy Squirrels high in the tree that Hari had located by their calls. The squirrels must have sensed an invisible electric fence around the tree at the 30-metre level, as they descended no lower no matter how long we waited. We also saw a selection of squirrels

which we had seen previously. After dark, we saw at least two Lesser Mousedeer deep in the underbrush, then a Malay Porcupine crossing the road. At Way Kanan we found a Pen-tailed Treeshrew that became momentarily stunned by the light, allowing for the first photos I had been able to take of the species. A Sunda Colugo also posed for obligingly for photos. Near the park entrance, and just as my batteries were dying, a Sunda Leopard Cat crossed the road, and a Sambar Deer was seen by the buildings near the entrance gate. A drive down a side road produced only a vine snake and a couple of domestic cats and we headed back to Satwa about 11:00 pm.





I allowed myself the luxury of sleeping in until 5:30 the next morning, which felt marvelous. After a shower and leisurely breakfast, I discovered my visa card wasn't working, perhaps due to a poor connection, so I paid up in a mixture of rupiah and US dollars and Hari gave me a lift to the bus station in Way Jepara. The bus arrived and quickly departed at 8:40, a time that didn't seem to correspond to any of the possible departure times I had been told. We drove 15 minutes down the road and then stopped

for a breakfast break, which left me wondering when exactly we might get to Java. After we were back on our way, the bus conductor came up to me speaking in Bahasa, which a kindly fellow passenger translated. He was asking me whether I wanted the fast ferry or the regular one. I asked when the fast ferry departed and was told “whenever you want”, which is my enduring ferry schedule fantasy but, I thought, unlikely to be true. Feeling flush due to this year’s surging stock market I opted to pay an extra \$4.00 for the express ferry. The conductor took pictures of people’s ID documents and then stopped in at a ferry booking kiosk which had a printed ticket in my name. Nice. The bus continued on to the port. I was told that the express ferry dock was a long distance away and it would take an hour to walk there. I jumped on the back of a motorcycle for the ride over, which turned out to be about 100 metres away. Families with small children walked over and beat me to the terminal building. At times the Indonesian capacity for hyperbole can make Trump look restrained.

I had checked possible options beforehand for travel to Mount Halimun. The most straightforward route appeared to be taking the train to Rangkasbitung and hiring a taxi from there. I asked a couple of people on the ferry and the consensus was that yes, that was probably the best way to go.

Sometimes the wisdom of crowds is incorrect. I walked off the ferry and into the cavernous station but saw no signs of trains. Chatting with a couple of people I was instructed to get on a motorcycle for a lift to the train station. The driver took me through the parking lot, over an overpass and into another parking lot where he pointed out the path to the train station. I walked down the rutted pathway to discover that the next train was not scheduled until 4:20 pm and, worse yet, it was completely booked up so the next available train to Rangkasbitung would not be until 7:00 pm. As it was currently 2:20 pm I didn’t love that idea, so I walked back across the street and spoke with a couple of people who suggested getting a bus to Serang and trying from there. Yelling “Serang” at the first passing bus gratifyingly caused it to stop and I hopped on. The bus took the fast toll highway but stopped halfway at a bus stop for some time, so I didn’t get into Serang until 4:20 pm. I was informed that all buses going south had left for the day but a taxi driver, Winda, was called over, who agreed to take me to Halimun for 500 000 rupiah. We mapped out the route on Google, which suggested a four-and-a-half-hour drive. I gave her the money for fuel and off we went.

After driving for a couple of hours, Winda announced that the trip took us into Bogor district and so the fare would be 200 000 rupiah more than previously agreed. I wasn’t in much of a position to negotiate so I reluctantly agreed. We reached the town of Jasinga about 7:00 pm, just after dusk, and Winda announced that it was too dangerous to go farther after dark, the road was poor and that we should stay here and continue in the morning. Jasinga didn’t look like the sort of place one would want to stay for any longer than necessary and certainly didn’t appear to have a hotel or guesthouse. Winda then asked if I was interested in taking a motorcycle taxi to continue the trip that night. I couldn’t see how this would be safer than taking a car but was keen to continue and so agreed. Winda negotiated with a guy who looked professional, even having a helmet, to take me to Gunung Halimun for the 200 000 rupiah I had agreed to previously. It felt suspiciously like there had been some forethought to this plan, but again I wasn’t in a strong bargaining position. The motorcycle was quite small, so I had to sit with my bag on my lap between me and the driver, which meant that I was not actually sitting on the seat, but on the rack behind the seat. This felt uncomfortable and precarious even before we had actually gone anywhere. We got some fuel, then started driving up the road which became increasingly bumpy, stopping several times to ask directions. At about 8:15 pm we stopped in a small village in the district of Cibebber Tengah. The driver conferred with a shopkeeper and announced that this was as far as we could

go tonight. The shopkeeper agreed that it was too late to go any further and asked if I wanted to stay in the village or continue on 4 km to a spot where there might be accommodation. Feeling like I'd been sodomized for the previous hour, I didn't particularly want to spend any more time on the back of the motorcycle. A number of villagers gathered for a discussion, the nocturnal arrival of a foreigner clearly being the biggest happening in the village in some time. A nearby house where I could sleep was pointed out and a photo was taken of my passport. The local English teacher was summoned and a woman who had been in a relationship with a German guy for a year and spoke fluent, if idiosyncratic, English arrived. Rarely have I been asked, "So, you wanna crash here?" in a remote village. The house allotted to me consisted of a small room with a mat on the floor, an empty room and a bathroom along with a collection of people smoking. Instant noodles and an egg were very thoughtfully brought out. The shopkeeper with whom we had initially chatted came over and wanted to know where I was staying in Mount Halimun National Park, who my guide was, what his contact information was and so on. Unfortunately, I hadn't arranged anything there in advance, figuring I would pitch up and figure it out on site, and my increasingly vague answers were causing the mood in the room to worsen. I suggested a call with Carlos Bocos but was told that they wanted to speak with an Indonesian, not another dodgy foreigner. Fortunately, Carlos was with Bobby Lambaihang in Sulawesi, and a quick video call de-escalated the situation considerably. Eventually the crowd departed and I laid out my Therma-Rest and went to sleep.

I emerged at dawn the next morning and was greeted with coffee and banana fritters, one of my favourite breakfasts. Two motorcycles, including one driven by the suspicious shopkeeper, appeared and we continued on our way. The road climbed, becoming increasingly rough along the way before turning to cobblestones. We passed a sign indicating the entrance to the park, but then also passed signs for the army jungle corps, a tea plantation and various other things not commonly found in national parks. We passed the turnoff to the camping area and arrived at Cikiniki research station and guest house just after 8:00 am. No one was around, but the very fact the station existed reassured the motorcyclists. Shortly after, a group of forestry students from Bogor University appeared, eager to practice their English. They spoke with Odi, the station manager, who showed me to a room in the guesthouse. The station had been built by the Japanese years earlier, but funding dried up about 15 years ago and the station has been deteriorating since although it was still perfectly serviceable. A group of students offered to show me the trails and we walked up to the point where a cell signal first appears, a very popular destination. Squirrels, likely Black-banded Squirrels, were the only mammals seen.

Back at the station, one of the students had sprained her ankle the day prior and her parents had driven out from Jakarta to see her. Bambang, her dad, had worked for 30+ years for Hatfield, a Canadian environmental consulting firm, had been to Vancouver and environs and spoke flawless English. I had a long chat with him while his wife oversaw the students' meal prep. They left with their daughter after lunch, and I asked him if he could help me arrange a taxi to Jakarta as I wasn't sure I was up for another long motorcycle ride on that particular road.

I went for a walk along the trail behind the station and was rewarded with views of two Javan Gibbons. Back at the station, the students divided into three groups and I joined one group for a hike to the village of Citalimab. On the way back from the village we found a group of shy Javan Surili/Langurs and later a troop of Javan Lutung which were settling down for the night. We heard a noise off in the bush which the students were sure was a leopard. I thought it was much more likely a bird but didn't want to dampen the sense of excitement and adventure in the group, so conceded it might possibly be a leopard. The

students invited me to join them for a delicious dinner of soup with sweet potato, fried chicken, rice and bananas.



After dark I walked both on the trails and the access road but saw no mammals whatsoever. Thunder and lightning were approaching, so I called it a night about 9:30 pm.

I was up about 5:30 pm to hike the trail to the village, seeing Javan Gibbons and lutung along the way. On the way back, I sent a message to Bambang inquiring if he had been able to help arrange a taxi to Jakarta. He replied that a driver would be delivering his daughter back to the station the following day and I would be welcome to get a lift with them. Never has the promise of a lift been so warmly received.

I returned to the station mid-morning for a nap, then headed out again in the afternoon. After seeing gibbons and lutung again, I heard a familiar trilling sound and found a Black-eared Pygmy Squirrel which, unusually for the species, descended quite far down a tree and posed briefly for photos. In the village, the local cooperative craft store was closed but I found the students hanging out in one of the homestays and ended up having an interesting and far-ranging discussion with them about everything from “tiger moms” to their plans for the future. Heavy rain started up about 4:00 pm and continued for several hours. After it eased, we walked back to the station along the road, seeing lots of frogs but no mammals. I did a night hike both on the trail and the road but again saw little of note.



The next morning, I surreptitiously climbed up the decrepit canopy tower. Seeing the missing steps on the canopy walkway I took a pass on that potential part of the expedition. I heard the gibbons but saw only previously-seen squirrel species. The promised vehicle arrived about 9:40 am and after tea and goodbyes we departed. If anything, the road was even rougher on the Bogor route, but the cobblestone portion was shorter, and we were off it within an hour. We stopped for lunch at a restaurant with a lovely view over the hills and then continued the descent down to the lowlands and the outskirts of Bogor. The

consensus was that I would be best off getting a taxi from the north end of Bogor. One was quickly located and I said goodbye to Bambang's wife and her sister and brother. The toll highway into Jakarta was non-congested and we made good time. On the drive in, I booked a hotel thinking it was close to the airport. It turned out to be downtown but I decided I could use an urban fix and so we headed into the heart of Jakarta. An evening walk around the area was quite a contrast from Halimun, with Gucci and Louboutin stores displaying their wares. An early morning taxi to the airport and I was on my way back to Canada.

In all it was a great trip, with high highs and low lows, as in any memorable voyage. My thanks to Paul Carter for his company on Siberut, to Wawan for arranging our trip there, to Ismael, Vincent and Frankie for their guiding, to Zacky, Gilang and Naufal in Kerinci, to Hari in Way Kambas, to the villagers in Cibeber Tengah and to Bambang and the final-year forestry students at Bogor University. Sumatra has experienced significant changes since I was last there 29 years ago but remains a wonderful destination for wildlife and wild settings. As always, if people have questions or would like further information, please feel free to email me at ibtson@yahoo.com.

Sincerely,

Ian Thompson,

Victoria, BC

Mammals seen:

1. Pen-tailed Treeshrew – *Ptilocercus lowii*
2. Greater/Common Treeshrew – *Tupaia glis*
3. Lesser Treeshrew – *Tupaia Minor*
4. Mentawai/Golden-bellied Treeshrew – *Tupaia chrysogaster*
5. Sunda Colugo – *Galeopterus variegatus*
6. Large Flying Fox – *Pteropus vampyrus*
7. Lesser/Forest Short-nosed Fruit Bat – *Cynopterus brachyotis*
8. Greater Short-nosed Fruit Bat – *Cynopterus sphinx*
9. Lesser False Vampire Bat – *Megaderma spasma*
10. Greater Long-tongued Nectar Bat – *Macroglossus sobrinus*
11. Small-disc Roundleaf Bat – *Hipposideros orbiculus*
12. Asian Whiskered Myotis – *Myotis muricola*
13. Sumatra Slow Loris – *Nycticebus hilleri*
14. Siberut Langur – *Presbytis siberu*
15. Mitred (Sumatran) Langur/Surili – *Presbytis mitrata*
16. Javan Langur/Surili – *Presbytis comata*
17. Silvered Langur – *Trachypithecus cristatus*
18. Western Javan Lutung – *Trachypithecus mauritius*
19. Pig-tailed Langur – *Simias concolor*
20. Long-tailed Macaque – *Macaca fascicularis*
21. Southern Pig-tailed Macaque – *Macaca nemestrina*

22. Kloss's Gibbon – *Hylobates klossii*
23. Siamang – *Symphalangus syndactylus*
24. Javan Gibbon – *Hylobates moloch*
25. Philippine Palm Civet – *Paradoxurus philippinensis*
26. Small-toothed Palm Civet – *Arctogalidia trivirgata*
27. Marbled Cat – *Pardofelis marmorata*
28. Sunda Leopard Cat – *Prionailurus javanensis*
29. Pantropical Spotted Dolphin – *Stenella attenuata*
30. Wild Pig – *Sus scrofa*
31. Greater Mousedeer – *Tragulus napu*
32. Lesser Mousedeer – *Tragulus kanchil*
33. Sambar -*Rusa unicolor*
34. Southern Red Muntjac – *Muntiacus muntjak*
35. Black Giant Squirrel – *Ratufa bicolor*
36. Cream-coloured Giant Squirrel – *Ratufa affinis*
37. Prevost's Squirrel – *Callosciurus prevostii*
38. Plantain Squirrel – *Callosciurus notatus*
39. Sunda Black-banded Squirrel – *Callosciurus nigrovittatus*
40. Mentawai/Lago Squirrel – *Callosciurus melanogaster*
41. Fraternal Squirrel – *Sundasciurus fraterculus*
42. Slender Squirrel – *Sundasciurus tenuis*
43. Three-striped Ground Squirrel – *Lariscus insignis*
44. Mentawai Ground Squirrel – *Lariscus obscurus*
45. Black-eared Pygmy Squirrel – *Nannosciurus melanotis*
46. Red Giant Flying Squirrel – *Petaurista petaurista*
47. Siberut Flying Squirrel – *Petinomys lugens*
48. Sipora Flying Squirrel – *Hylopetes sipora*
49. Malayan Porcupine – *Hystrix brachyura*
50. Pacific Rat – *Rattus exulans*
51. Mentawai Long-tailed Giant Rat – *Leopoldamys siporanus*
52. Mentawai Archipelago Rat – *Rattus lugens*
53. Mentawai Spiny Rat – *Maxomys pagensis*
54. Sundaic Arboreal White-bellied Rat – *Niviventer cremoriventer*
55. Indomalayan Long-tailed Giant Rat – *Leopoldamys sabanus*
56. Rajah Sundaic Spiny Rat – *Maxomys rajah*