

## Viet Nam – Cat Tien NP 9/12 – 12/12 2017

Viet Nam has been on my radar for a long time, but the distance and reporting difficulties finding mammals I supposed turned me off a bit. I got a golden opportunity in December 2017 to combine a few days in the forest an visiting an old friend escaping the Swedish winter. The combination of finding some new species and going down the memory lane over a beer or two with an old friend was too good to resist.

Reading many trip reports I did not dare to expect too much as many animals seems to be difficult to find and are very skittish once you do due to the persisting hunting pressure. The new director, I was told, takes the situation more serious than the last, but they still have a long way to go, which the lodges cook demonstrated. He found a big snake and got hold of James, the resident PhD student living on the premises. James did his things and released the snake. The cook was really angry that he did not get the snake back afterwards to eat. The last cook got fired for the very same reason.

### *Trip arrangement*

It is pretty straight forward going to Cat Tien NP from the international airport in Ho Chi Minh City. I took the easy way out and arranged the transport and accommodation with <http://forestfloorlodges.com/>, an excellent choice. There are a few options to stay in the park itself, at the rustic HQ by the ferry, The more upscale Forest Floor Lodge and at the wild Crocodile Lake. Staying inside the park is necessary for many of the nocturnal animals only existing on that side of the dividing river, like my target species number one, the Pygmy Slow Loris, as the ferries stop running at dusk.



Forest Floor Lodge

Forest Floor Lodge offers a range of different accommodation options and I stayed in the very comfortable safari tents down by the river with some excellent views over the rainforest. Not a bad view to wake up with a cup of coffee or enjoy an afternoon whisky to.



View from tent



View from tent

The food was good and beer cold. I got some great tips were to find my key species from James. He said he found the Pygmy Slow Loris virtually every time he looked for them. I probably looked skeptical so he offered to walk with me if I did not find them myself to sooth. Forest Floor can arrange all the tours you like, which they did very well. The other option is to arrange tours via the HQ, not too far away from the lodge.

It was an adventure in a Rolls-Royce.

### *The forest*

Cat Tien NP is an amazing Lowland Tropical Rainforest with a mixture of evergreen forest with huge trees, swamps, deciduous and bamboo forest. Included for free in all walks is a leech therapy. After 4 days walking in the forest my blood must have been clean as never before.

I arrived late afternoon and was very eager to get out into the forest. Walked for a couple of hours and only saw some silvery shadows moving high up in the trees. I suspected (more likely hoped) them being Annamese Silvered Langurs, but I never got a clear look and could not yet add them to my list. Saw a few **Pallas's Squirrels**, which seems to be very common, as well as a group of **Long-tailed Macaques**, also quite common. Another smaller species of squirrels moved in the dense undergrowth, but it was too brief for me to identify. That's the price I guess you pay for walking alone.



Pallas Squirrel

Later that evening I went/biked on my first night walk by myself. The lodge lend out mountain bikes for free, so I opted to go by one to cover more distance. The bikes are rather old, very low, and in general not very good. This in combination with a big camera back pack, a tripod and a very muddy road at night made this not a very nice experience. This was the only nocturnal trip I did by bike. With drier roads going by bike is a nice option though I believe as it is flat.

It took me the better part of the first 15 minutes to find my first **Pygmy Slow Loris** some 3m up in a tree and another 15 minutes, some 20-25m up in a tree, to find my second for the night. I almost could have gone home, but only almost.



The 2<sup>nd</sup> night found 1 Loris and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last night none, so not a 100% success rate. After a couple of hours I decided to call it a night as I had a very early morning tour booked to look for the endemic Golden-cheeked Gibbon. The night also produced 1 **Sambar Deer**, the only one for the tour, and 1 **Asian Palm Civet**, also the only one for the trip, just outside the lodge.

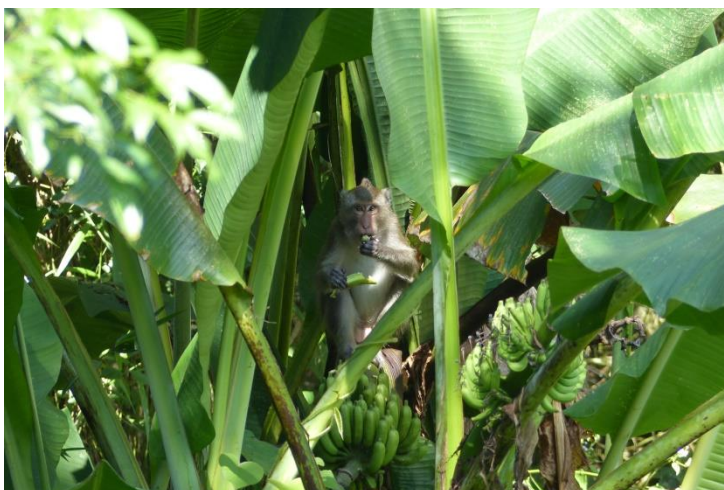
The NP is famous for one of the endemic species of gibbons, the **Golden-cheeked Gibbon**. As often is the case with Gibbons, the tour began very early an my alarm disturbed me at 4. They are readily seen on most mornings,

but are by no means guaranteed. So if you miss out one morning you can go for free the next, which I was very close doing. We went into the forest when it was pitch dark, sat down and waited for the sun to rise and with that some beautiful Gibbon song. When you hear the morning call you follow/run after it. After a while my guide said we should go for a walk which turned into a sprint. He probably heard something far away that I did not, for after 30 min. or so, he had located a family of three. After 5 minutes or so they saw us and took off, which was the case with most endemic primates. There must be few creatures more graceful than Gibbons swinging from tree to tree.



Golden-cheeked Gibbon

After a fine breakfast at 7.30, I took the bike towards a birding tower, some 30 minutes away from the lodge. During the day the biking was fine bar knee and ass pain. The bamboo forest after the HQ was supposed to be good for Long-tailed Macaques, Pygmy Squirrels and Treeshrews and on the grass plains Southern Red Muntjac are sometimes seen during the day and Gaur late evening. A group of Long-tailed Macaques were feeding on bananas and 1 **Southern Red Muntjac** grazed on the meadow.



Long-tailed Macaque



Southern Red Muntjac

I did not go for the Gaurs should be easier seen during the rainy season anyway and I still wanted to get some primates in front of my lens. Suddenly a Bear walked beside the road, and I was very excited. The lasted until a few seconds later when I remembered the bear rescue center. Damn!

In the afternoon I booked a tour with the HQ with the aim of finding Annamese Silvered Langur. We drove and drove but no Langurs. Until the driver stopped and said he had seen something. And there one **Annamese Silvered Langur** sat well hidden in the thicket, but too bad to get any shot. Local guides never stop to impress me in their skills in finding animals escaping my eyes.

After this success we drove towards the bear rescue center and the bamboo forest. Treeshrews and pygmy squirrels can be found in that area, but nothing today. The Long-tailed Macaque family sat in the same trees I had left them yesterday.

The night walk brought one Pygmy Slow Loris, a lot of moving eyes and flying bats.

Next morning I tagged along with James and two of his guests to the Crocodile Lake, some 15 km from the lodge. We started at 7:45 and we went by an old car the first 10km we went by car, which was very productive with a group of **Wild Boars** in the undergrowth and a group of **Northern Pig-tailed Macaques**. The others also saw a Lesser Mouse Deer briefly beside the road. My attention was elsewhere, so I missed out. Again, damn!

The 5 km walk on a very well-marked trail towards the lake is a good spot for my last main target species, the beautiful **Black-shanked Douc Langur**. They can be found closer to the lodge as well, but closer to the lake they are supposedly easier to spot. It was very good with at least 2 different groups of the Langurs, possible three in the span of 2 hours. As usual they were very skittish and fled as soon as they saw me but I managed to get a few shots at least.

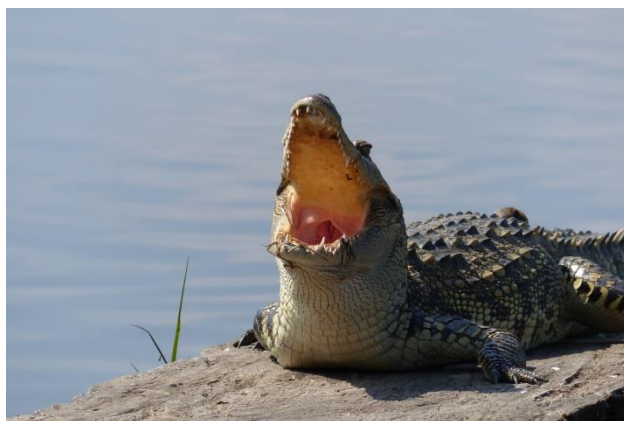


Black-shanked Douc Langur

The lake is very nice filled with Siamese Crocodiles. They serve some semi-cold beer also. It seems to be a great place to stay for a few nights (not only because of the beers).



Crocodile Lake



Siamese Crocodile

The 2 hour night walk on my 3<sup>rd</sup> and last night did not produce anything mammaly.

On my last morning, I took a short stroll toward the bamboo forest close to the HQ. Squirrels and Treeshrews were on the agenda. No squirrels, but after a lot of searching I found what I believe to be a **Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew** foraging and not too shy.



Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew

A lovely, if short, mammal watching trip was over.

Torbjörn Lundqvist

## Mammal list

Species	Latin
Sambar Deer	<i>Rusa unicolor</i>
Pygmy Slow Loris	<i>Nycticebus pygmaeus</i>
Asian Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus hermaphroditus</i>
Golden-cheeked Gibbon	<i>Nomascus gabriellae</i>
Southern Red Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
Long-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>
Black-shanked Douc Langur	<i>Pygathrix nigripes</i>
Annamese Silvered Langur	<i>Trachypithecus margarita</i>
Northern Pig-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca leonina</i>
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scofra</i>
Northern Smooth-tailed Treeshrew	<i>Dendrogale murina</i>
Pallas's Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus erythraeus flavimanus</i>