

Indonesia September 2018: East Java, Sulawesi, Bali, Komodo Island Group and Sumatra

The local holiday season allowed me to take almost a month off in September without using up too many vacation days.. I really have been fantasizing about the Sunda islands again. But since AA Borneo was fully booked almost a year in advance (!) I decided to organize a trip there for 2019 (more on that in a separate post), and join my family to Indonesia in 2018.

We did both the touristy stuff (Prambanan, Borobodour, Mt. Bromo, Komodo Island's pink beaches etc.) and concentrated on mammal watching on Sulawesi (1 day Tangkoko – 3 of us; 3 days Nantu – only me) and Sumatra by myself, for a week at the end of the trip, while my mom and sister continued to Singapore. I can't say I got particularly lucky, but I did see some cool things including my first ever tarsier and cuscus, manta ray, komodo dragon and lots of birds.

Briefly about Java, Bali and Komodo:

So on Java we started out in Jogjakarta and traveled eastwards. I had no time, unfortunately, to squeeze in Gunung Gede. We visited Mt. Merapi, Prambanan, Borobudour, and Candi Gedong Songo. After a night in Semarang we flew to Surabaya where we continued to Mt. Bromo for a night and then the city of Surabaya for another night before continuing to Sulawesi. Not having time for Gn. Gede, I really only thought I had a good chance at two species I wanted to see on Java, which occur throughout it and Bali: Javan Lutung (Ebony Langur) and Javan Ferret Badger. But basically Central Java has no forests left except on mountains. On the flight from Sumarang to Surabaya I was looking out the window, and literally the entire flight all you see is cultivated fields without a single tract and forest left. I did see some nice birds in Prambanan (including Javan munia and Coppersmith Barbet, both which were common) and a tiny little microbat, which I will never identify, but was really common. At night, after the super-boring Javan Ballet that my mom made us go to (we left in the middle), I took a picture of another bat, so if someone can identify it for me, I'll revise this report and add it to the list, but it's unlikely because of overexposure:



On Mt Merapi, while we were having lunch at Ulen Sentalu outdoors Museum, at elevation of 885masl, I spotted a squirrel, which again, I'm not a squirellogist, but from the ear and the nose, it pretty much looks like a **black-striped squirrel**:



At Borobudur I saw some nice birds such as the Javan Kingfisher and the brown-throated sunbird, and yet another squirrel, which I'm imagining is the **black-striped squirrel** but feel free to correct me.



Borobudur Squirrel

After a few days on Java we hit up Sulawesi and then Bali for 2 nights (Sanur), then Flores for 2 nights and back to Bali (Ubud) for 4 nights. On Bali, in Uluwatu Temple and in the few different places known as “monkey parks”, **crab-eating macaques** are abundant. My mom had a particularly close encounter with one who stole her glasses right off her face, and broke it...

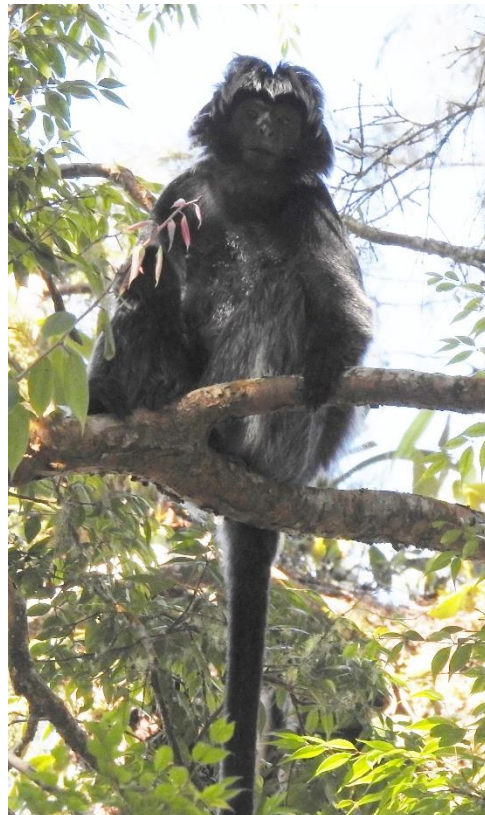


We only spent 2 nights on Flores, arriving just in time for amazing sunset, drinks, and dinner the first night, and taking an excursion to Komodo and other nearby islands the next whole day. So we didn't have time to explore Flores itself. On the boat to Padar Island and then Komodo island, I didn't see any dolphins or anything, but on

Komodo island itself we did see a few **Javan Rusa deer**, even though it's most likely an introduced population. But of course the real stars of Komodo Island are the *dragons*! To be honest they looked a tiny bit smaller than I had imagined. And while we didn't see 3m individuals we did see 2m+ individuals. Anyway, super cool, to say the least. There are also a bunch of birds on the island, with the most sought-after by bird watchers being the critically-endangered yellow-crested cockatoo. But since we were only on the island for about an hour and a half or so, and during the heat of the middle of the day, we were told our chances to see them are small. Indeed, despite keeping on the lookout, I did not see any. I did see some *green imperial pigeons* and *blue-tailed bee-eaters*.



Back on Bali, on the day-before-last, my sister and I took a day-trip to Gunung Ijen (back on Java) to see the blue fire (it's quite amazing). The trip from Bali actually starts at night, when they pick you up and you drive all night toward Java, crossing the island, taking the ferry, and driving to where you start climbing the volcano. You start climbing up at 1am, and the entire adventure lasts until about 6am or so, just after sunrise. So you get to see both the blue fire (if you're luck) at night, and then the sunrise. But being on Gunung Ijen that still has some good forest at the bottom, I thought it was my last chance to connect with Javan Lutung, which still exists there according to things I read. So when we got back down from the volcano, after a long, sleepless night where we hiked up and down the very steep mountain, my guide, driver, and sister were all shocked and appalled when I asked to be dropped off at some point along on the road, and be picked up 40 minutes later, before continuing to breakfast and then back to Bali, for what would end up being almost a 24—hour sleepless excursion. So from 6:50am to about 7:30am, is how long I had to find the **Javan Lutung**. Amazingly, despite my eyes itching from the toxic gases in the volcano, my contacts being dried up, and my brain going on no sleep, I found it alongside the road, which was really cool! Actually I spotted 1 group which was far too deep in the forest, and then when I got back in the car I spotted another group on the side of the road.



Sulawesi – 4 nights

So after Java (and before Bali), we flew to Sulawesi. This gets divided into 2 parts:

1. Tangkoko
2. Nantu Forest

Tangkoko is widely known, and not much needs to be said about it: **Crested Macaque**, **Bear cuscus** and **Spectral Tarsier** are basically guaranteed. The cuscus takes the most effort out of the 3, but I haven't heard of someone who hasn't seen it.

Except for Bobby, the guides don't really know to tell squirrels apart, but basically **Whitish-eared** and **Celebes Dwarf squirrels** are easily found.

As far as palm civets go, apparently they're really hard since the fire that happened a few years ago, so we didn't try. But two more things that need to be mentioned, since you're in Sulawesi are: the birds (yes, the birds...) and the lodge.

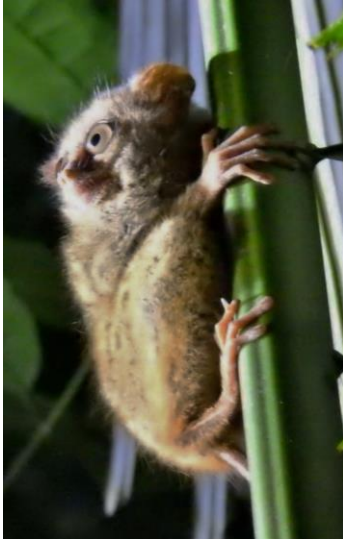


I'll start with the latter: Tangkoko Lodge is very warm and inviting, with comfortable beds, air-conditioned rooms, hot watered showers, nice

views, caring staff and very decent food. It's a good base for any wildlife activities.

Second, is the birds. The birds of Sulawesi are like somebody took regular birds and said "fuck it, just throw more colors on them!" So you really can't ignore them. Right from the balcony of the room, the first 2 minutes I spent there while waiting for my mom and sister to get ready, I saw an awesomely bright *great hanging parrot* eating off the mango tree on the lodge grounds.

Later, in the forest, since there are only basically 5 mammals to search for, your guide will also point out tons of colorful birds. In addition to the aforementioned mammals we also saw *ochre-bellied boobook*, *green-backed kingfisher*, *yellow-billed malkoha*, *Sulawesi Drongo*, *green and*



silver-tipped imperial pigeons, and searched but didn't find the *Sulawesi scopes owl*, which didn't respond to a recording. The first day Bobby guided us ourselves, and the next morning his assistant, Medli, guided us.

In the morning we saw the two **squirrels** again, and also *red-knobbed hornbill* feeding its young, *Sulawesi Dwarf kingfisher*, *purple-winged roller*, *ashy woodpecker*, *Elegant*



Sunbird, and searched for but didn't find Sulawesi pitta. Apparently it's also been very difficult since the fire.

If you were only searching for mammals and completely uninterested with birds, you may get bored after 1 afternoon at Tangkoko.

After just 1 day there, I split from my mom and sister who traveled to Makassar and Ranau, while me and Meldi, one of Bobby's guides and one of the *Macaca nigra* researchers, flew to Gorontalo for Babirusas and friends.

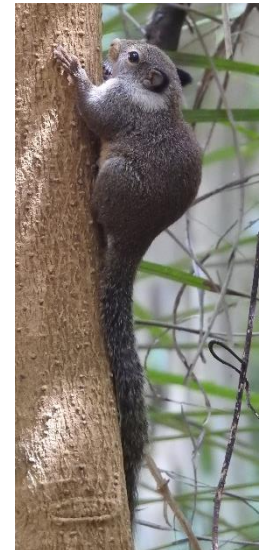
This is Part 2 of Sulawesi:

I only had 3 nights and wanted to maximize my time searching for Babirusas, Anoas, Heck's Macaque, Sulawesi Warty Pig and Sulawesi Palm civet. So I chose to fly to Gorontalo and have 2 full days at the hide at Nantu Forest, knowing that this is the dry season, so chances are good for all species, supposedly.

In retrospect, and especially considering how much I paid for this portion, I may have skipped this and joined my family, elsewhere. To be frank, this is the least enjoyable mammal watching excursion I've ever had. And at the same time – the most expensive (!), relative to the amount of time I spent there.

I stayed at the Park Headquarters, which, compared to it, the Elephant Hotel in Yakadouma, Cameroon was like a semi-decent holiday Inn. My room was completely devoid of furniture, and all the walls and floor were decorated with (mostly) dead insects and spider webs. Thank God Bobby lent me his mosquito net and a towel I asked for. I gave it to Meldi at the end.

In the room which has all broken windows, they put a mattress and some sheets. I asked for a pillow. They had one. The second night I also asked for a blanket. They gave me something. I also asked for a chair to put my suitcase on, because I didn't want to put it on the floor. They



gave me the only chair in the entire place.

Just to note on who is "they" – I was accompanied by a park ranger, who drove out to meet us at Gorontalo, and then drove us all the way back to the village. On the way, we picked up my private cook for the next 3.5 days. And then of course there is my guide, Meldi. So there is me + a crew of 3 that are here to accommodate me for the next 3.5 days. They were all really nice and attentive, but spoke no English, except for Meldi, who speaks somewhat decent English (and has great spotting skills).

But back to the forest reserve headquarters: there is no running water, and the only toilet+shower is a tiny, insect-infested room that comes out of the main sleeping/dining space. So your friends can hear you "showering" (bucket of water, of course), or going to the bathroom. The last thing I will comment on is the food. I will echo Jon's assessment of the food of Nantu area. The second morning I didn't feel like eating rice and fish heads for breakfast, so I grabbed a banana, and almost ate it, before I looked a little closer and found maggots crawling in the brown spots. Needless to say I haven't had a banana since...

Maybe I'm just being a little spoiled brat with my dislike to this experience, but I'm just comparing it to every other wildlife experience I've had across the world.

Anyway, onto the wildlife: well first, since we're in Sulawesi, you will be greeted to the forest by birds. This actually changed my mood for the better. In the hour or so that it takes to get from the car to the hide, we saw both *Red-knobbed* and *Sulawesi Dwarf hornbills*, *Yellow-breasted racquet-tails*, *ornate lorikeets*, *blue-backed parrots*, *silver-tipped imperial pigeon*, *collared* and *blue-eared kingfisher*, *ashy woodpecker*, *black kite*, at least 1 colorful species of *fruit dove*, and some others.

The Babirusa hide is uncomfortable, dark and small – as Jon Hall described it back when he and Coke were there. Apparently, the upper hide broke, so there's only the lower one hide. I'm not sure if there are plans to fix the upper one.

First, a single **Heck's macaque** was drinking when we arrived, and within 20 minutes we saw our first group of 2 female **North Sulawesi Babirusas**. Later a larger group came, followed by a cute family of **Sulawesi Warty Pigs**. We saw some interesting weaning behavior by the Warty Pigs. Then, for a few hours nothing was happening. A few birds here and there included mostly





parrots and doves (but of the colorful kinds, because this is Sulawesi!)

We had lunch at different times – Meldi and I. I went first - the rangers walked me back to the ranger station, and I must say that this was a well-needed break from that tiny little hide with uncomfortably-situated peeking holes. I also absolutely must give credit to the ranger, who was with us the entire time: he was just as enthusiastic about the wildlife as I was, and kept spotting things like *hornbills* and **macaques**, even on our short, “solo” hikes to and from lunch. Really – everyone was extremely accommodating and enthusiastic about the animals and the conservation. If only there was a decent place to stay... (and decent food). After my lunch, while Meldi was eating, a male babirusa showed up and I took some pictures. I believe I made a mistake by sticking the lens of my camera out of the hide, so the animals got scared really quick, and didn't stick around. I corrected that on the second day.

On the second day we were greeted to the corn fields by a large, plain black snake, which Meldi called a *Sulawesi Cobra*. Really bad timing to be blowing my nose as the snake perfectly (and rather quickly) crossed the path and disappeared into the bushes. Not wanting to litter with my tissue, I missed my opportunity to take a picture, so I will never know which species it actually



was. According to Wikipedia, Javan spitting Cobra may occur on Sulawesi, and King Cobra is confirmed. But I don't think it was the latter. Damn. My other requests for today, other than hoping for an Anoa, was try for the Sulawesi Palm Civet after dark, and get some pictures of an ornate lorikeet since I've never been anywhere

before where lorikeets occur. So we easily found some, and less easily took a couple of somewhat-decent pictures. I also wanted a picture of the Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbill, but we didn't get one this morning, despite having seen the species yesterday. When we got to the hide, there were once again **Heck's macaques** which didn't stick around too long, again. I made sure to keep my entire camera including the lens inside the hide today. Then I heard some rustling in the leaves of the hide itself from the outside, and saw a hairy little tail underneath the bottom of the hide. I walked outside and found this tiny, tiny, tiny little squirrel, which I still think is a different species than the supposed "**Celebes dwarf squirrel**" of Tangkoko (see comparison pictures below).



The 2 pictures on the left show the tiny "pygmy" squirrel outside the babirusa hide. The picture on the right shows the much larger squirrel at Tangkoko. Notice the much rounder tail end, tiny ears, which don't protrude from the shape of the head, no white outline around the eyes on the "pygmy" squirrel, and seriously it was so tiny. Again, my feeling is that they're not the same species, but I'm not a squirrel expert. Anyway, if you're at the Babirusa hide, you will most likely hear some rustling in the leaves, of an animal so small you'll dismiss it as a small lizard. Instead – go out quietly and see if it's the squirrel. It was there throughout the day, but I never got a good picture of it (although when I didn't have my camera I was able to stand there for a long time and we stared at each other without moving). The next person who records it, we can diagnose which species it is 😊. I have 1 theory where the supposed "Celebes dwarf squirrel" from Tangkoko looks more like a Sanghir squirrel, which is not known from mainland Sulawesi, but could be introduced or just unknown. Anyway, I may stand corrected again.

Throughout this day we saw many more **Babirusas**, some more **Macaques**, a *Monitor Lizard* behind the hide, and many more *pigeons* and *doves*. But no Anoas. During the lunch breaks, several warty were hanging out around the rangers' station. I didn't realize until night how abundant they are.... They are EVERYWHERE. Tons of them. After leaving the hide around 17:15-17:30, we walked back to the ranger station and waited until dark for the civet. Apparently a civet frequently passes by the kitchen, and sometimes stays in that area long enough for a

picture. Before dark, when I came back from a quick bathroom break, Meldi had gone with my camera to get a picture of the *Sulawesi dwarf hornbill*. He was only gone for 10 minutes and came back, apologizing that his pictures aren't clear enough. It was funny... good job Meldi. Now I have some "record" shots of the dwarf hornbill.

After dark, we went behind the kitchen and waited. We turned off the flashlight, waited, turned it back on, and searched the area.. on-and-off for about an hour or so. But no civet. We did see tons of **Warty Pigs** including large sounders. I suggested we hike the forest and look for it, but Meldi said it was a difficult animal to find, but we tried – we hiked to the river and looked for it in the trees on the other side of the river as well. Nothing. Meldi said that he had 2 clients who wanted to see it, so they tried for 5 evenings in a row behind the kitchen, and saw it on the 3rd and 5th evenings. I told him I could never stay here for 5 nights. I was done. Anoa or not, I will not be visiting this place any time soon. Or ever, unless they build a lodge or a homestay.

I should note that I didn't see a drop of rain during my entire stay on Sulawesi, which should in theory be good for Anoas. A group that were here the day before me saw 2 throughout the day.

Sumatra – 7 nights

I've expressed my fascination with Sumatra's infinite biodiversity before, in an extended note. Last time I was in Sumatra, Jon and I visited the Leuser ecosystem, and together with Jean-Michel, we explored Way Kambas.

But I still felt like there is so much potential on Sumatra, with several golden cat sightings on the main trail of Kerinci, tiger and clouded leopards on Tapan road, and what not.

I was in touch with an American field researcher who studied the cats of Bukit Barisan Selatan at Way Canguk research station, who has seen almost all the lowland and sub-montane species you can imagine throughout her 7-month stay, including the Sumatran striped rabbit and Golden cat, among others. The Tiger population of Way Canguk is actually on the rise as of 2018 according to surveys, it's considered a very good place to search for Malay Tapir, and they still have a couple Sumatran Rhinos there too (arguably, according to Mongabay's piece on "Where are the rhinos of B.B.S?"). But best of all - no tourists!

I also thought I might try Kerinci and Tapan road for the chance encounter with all species of all elevations, besides rhino which no longer occurs in the park.

I actually looked up the distribution maps and read articles about the occurrence of all the species I was after in the areas I was considering for my travels (extremely nerdy of me), and here is what I came up with:

Species	Animals I'm interested in				Notes
	Gunung Kerinci	Tapan Road	Way Cangkok	Rimbang Baling	
Sumatran Rhino	No	No*	Apparently, but hasn't been seen	No	Could still occur in Kerinci Seblat but further south, way south of Tapan Road. Maybe extinct in BBS as of 2018
Sumatran Tiger	Yes	Yes	Yes, healthy population	Yes	Numbers are on the rise in BBS as of 2018
Golden Cat	Yes - see notes	Yes, except the very beginning	Yes	Yes	On Kerinci - several sightings, usually chasing one of the ground birds in the lower altitudes
Sunda Clouded Leopard	No	Yes, except the 1st 1/3	Yes	Yes	on Tapan - only in lower elevations but stops before reaching Tapan
Marbled Cat	Yes	Yes	According to IUCN**	Yes	But many nights of camera trapping showed very little if any signs
Sun Bear	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Malayan Tapir	No	only in lowest elevations (last 1/4 of the road before Tapan town)	Yes - in good numbers	Yes	
Sumatran Striped Rabbit	Supposedly	???	Apparently yes ???	???	IUCN maps show it only in a section of Souther Kerinci Seblat and Northern BBS, way North of Way Cangkok. But camera trapping and Vladimir Dinets prove that it exists in the general vicinity of Way Cangkok, 10's of km south of IUCN recognized distribution. Wild Sumatra contact told me they exist on Kerinci. There is not much known about this species...
Dhole	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Sumatran Serow	Yes	Yes	yes	yes	
Sumatran Hog Badger	Yes	Yes except lowest elevations	Apparently not	Some overlap	
Sunda Stink Badger	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	Yes*	IUCN maps mistakenly only show it in Sabah on Borneo, but it also exists all over Sumatra according to the WCS and the verbiage in IUCN's own geographic range section of the species assessment
Banded Linsang	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Supposedly all over the island
Sunda pangolin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Indonesian Mountain Weasel	Yes	Only on higher elevations (1st half of the road)	No	No	
Malay Weasel	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes	Occurs all over Sumatra
Horsfield's Tarsier	No	No	Yes	No	
Moonrat	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Small-clawed otter	Yes	yes	Yes	yes	
Smooth-coated otter	Yes	Yes	yes	Yes	
Hairy-nosed otter	No	No	Yes	No	
European Otter	Yes	yes	Yes	yes	
Short-tailed Mongoose	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Malayan Porcupine	Yes	Yes	Yes	yes	
Sumatran Porcupine	Yes	Yes	yes	yes	
long-tailed porcupine	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Tapanuli Orangutan	No	No	No	No	Only in Northern Sumatra
Flat-headed cat	No	No	Supposedly yes, but none recorded	Yes	

So this is all very exciting in potential. Well, I'll spare you the long story.. But after corresponding with several figures at BBS and Wild Sumatra at Kerinci Seblat, I decided to only go with the latter, since getting special permission to visit Way Cangkok would take too long, having to visit their offices in Java (if I understood correctly), and even then, I would need to find a local guide who speaks a little English, knows where to find Way Cangkok, since it's not marked anywhere, and could accommodate me in my mammal searches - day and night. The probability and logistics of all this happening seemed very unlikely, and so going with Wild Sumatra to the Kerinci Seblat ecosystem seemed to be the better choice - especially since Luke was so responsive, and all my requests were answered with a "yes". I knew I was in good hands.

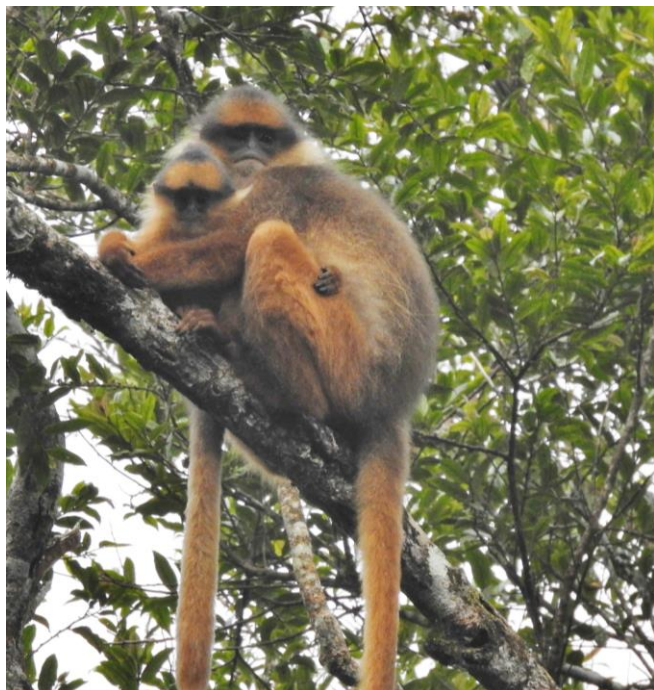
When I arrived in Sumatra everything ticked smoothly from the moment I landed. In the future, visitors to Kerinci should spare the 7-8hour drive by flying to the newly-opened Kerinci airport. Even though the drive is gorgeous, and I spotted some **pig-**

tailed macaques and a *lesser spotted eagle* on the way.

One of the main requests that were promised and fulfilled by Wild Sumatra was that my guide/s don't smoke while we're mammal watching. If you've ever visited Sumatra, you know this is a hard request to fulfill, as everyone here chain smokes like it was their oxygen. My non-English speaking driver from Padang Airport lit up a cigarette on an average every 5-10 minutes, and when we stopped roadside to have a smoke break with his friends he spotted along the way, he had 2 or 3 in a row with no break. Thankfully, none of my guides smoked inside the forest!

Luke put me in the newly opened Bintang hotel in the town of Kercic Tuo, which, after my experiences in Sulawesi, I was afraid to see it. To my surprise, I was ecstatic to see a rather modern looking small hotel with... are you ready for this? Hot showers!! And a TV, and breakfast, and coffee available 24/7, and even a small lobby.. I was in heaven. We didn't go spotlighting the first evening both because I was tired from the flights from Bali, and the long drive, and also because this was the night before full moon, so the moonrise was before sunset, and I figured we may have better luck starting early tomorrow.

So the forest of Kerinci is obviously in very healthy condition. In the first half an hour we saw **Sumatran Surilis** and **Siamangs**, even in the same spot at one point. It's funny that I spent so much time trying to get a good picture of the notoriously shy Surilis, not realizing I would have so many relaxed, close encounters with them I would get bored with them by the end of the trip. I didn't spend much time with the Siamangs because I already had perfect views of them in WK previously. You can't ignore the birds either... We had so many species in the first couple of hours including *great hornbills*,

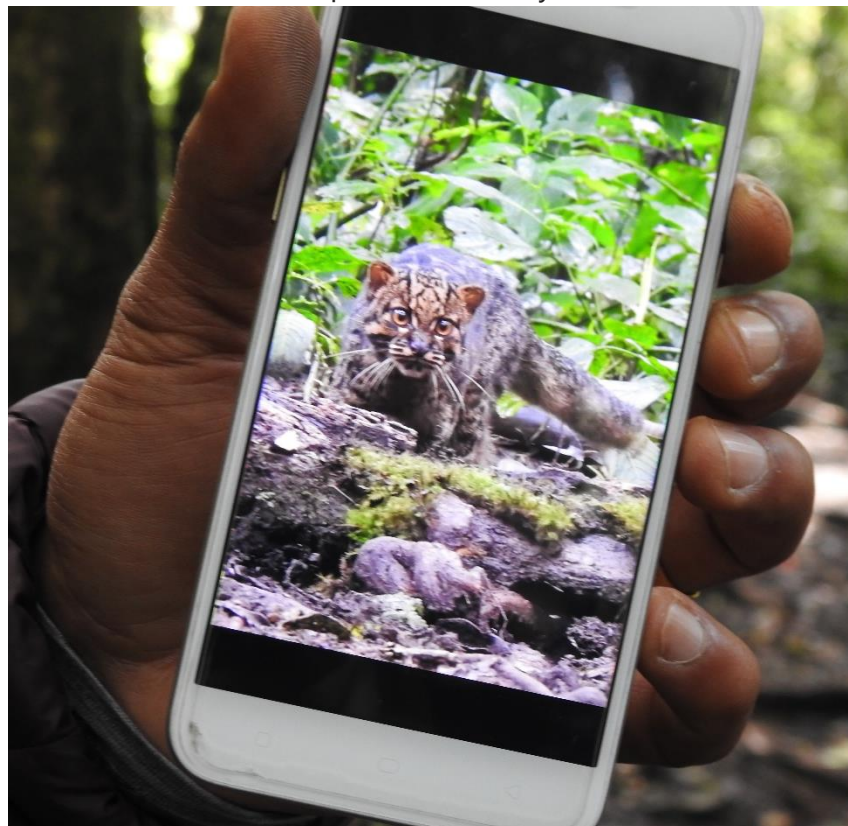




Salvadori's pheasant, whistling thrushes, indigo and other flycatchers, long-tailed broadbills, fire-tufted barbets and many others. If I were a birder I'd nut myself.

Mammalwise, **Niobi ground squirrels** were abundant in Pos 2 (Air Minum? I don't know where these names come from.. There are signs labeled Pos 1 and Pos 2, with Indonesian names that do not translate to "Basecamp" or "Air Minum", but Rocky Bench and Mossy Trees, or something like that) with **treeshrews, slender** and **Cream-colored giant squirrels** along the way.

Based on some previous assessments and suggestions, and based on all the 10 or so golden cat encounters I read about, with the golden cat being my prime target, I did not venture past Pos2. I also read an article about the activity of cats in the Kerinci-Seblat ecosystem that mentioned that golden cats' activity seemed to peek during daytime as opposed to the night. In Pos1 I saw a few guides and birders, one of whom was Dewi - Subandi's son. He happily showed me a picture on his phone of a marbled cat he took toward the start of the trail this past June or July.



Another guide from Wild Sumatra took me about 50m off the main trail from Pos1 to show me today's fresh Sumatran Tiger scat! I was happy to see that the forest is full of predators. But long-story short, while the weather gods were very kind to me (no rain the entire time except a 30-min downpour the 1st afternoon and a 5-min drizzle the 2nd night), the gods of felidae have forsaken me. Throughout my stay there, I walked up and down the trail in search of *Salvadori's pheasant* and *Red-billed partridges*, which are the two species often seen being followed/hunted by golden cats. I found both, but only once managed to hide far enough for them to not see me and go about their business undisturbed. My guide, by the way, Ighun, was new and not super experienced, but what he lacked in experience he made up for in enthusiasm, flexibility and compliance with my every wish. First he really wanted to show me Schneider's pitta, but when I told him I'm mostly interested in mammals he was very cool with letting me walk first, walking quietly or waiting and sitting on the trail, etc.



The first night we camped at Pos2. Before sundown we were ambushed by the **Niobe ground squirrels**, and after dark there was at least 1 **mouse** that came really close to the tents. I'm not really sure which species, but it had a contrast of orange upper body and a distinctly white under-part. I had great views but didn't manage a picture. This was the night of a full moon, so I wasn't expecting much on our walk.. But I was still surprised to have seen absolutely nothing, walking very slowly and quietly from Pos2 to Pos1 and back. By the way, my super-powerful pretty expensive Led Lenser torch broke on me



AGAIN this trip, before Sumatra! How annoying and disappointing. But luckily, once again - Wild Sumatra were able to accommodate me with strong lights that were about as good as my own. Regardless, the first evening was disappointing.

On the second day we woke up at 5 after a very cold night. After a quick coffee, we were back on the trail down the mountain all the way to the beginning and back. We again saw many **Surilis**, some **Siamangs, squirrels** and birds. But no terrestrial



mammals other than the ground squirrels. We did see an additional, new tiger scat, lower down along the main track. I asked to move the camp down to Pos1 for tonight, so that we can hit the lower slopes during the night walk, since all cat sightings were down there, and both tiger poops were below or at Pos1. Also Pos1 is as high as we saw Salvadori's pheasant, so I figured it's as high as I should try to search for Golden cat. When we returned, we started to move our camp. Again, Ighun let me walk quietly alone first, while he and Danny our porter were packing everything up and setting up the new camp. But once again I didn't see any new mammals. I did see a *Sumatran Trogon*, which was new. That was the only bird I really wanted to see and photograph

other than the mammals. In the early afternoon, once we set camp, after a very cold night, with no place to wash up, even just my face, I asked to stop back at the hotel for a hot shower and new clothes, which were in my suitcase that I left there. We would start back up toward camp right around 16:00, which I thought was a good time for hiking. I stayed and followed a family of pheasants, but again - no cat. Perhaps the presence of a tiger along the main trail put off the golden cats. Perhaps the 2.5 full days I spent on the mountain are not enough for golden cat, unless you get really lucky. Tonight the moon was supposed to rise around 30-40 min after complete darkness, so we started our night walk early, but only saw 3-4 arboreal **rats**. Not sure which species. I really should have bought a thermal scope before this trip! I will have it for sure on my next one. Not sure if it's the moon, bad luck, weather conditions, too loud (even though we tried to walk really quietly) or what, but we recorded no interesting nocturnal species.

One thing to note is that when I asked guides along the way about cats and mammals, they all told me to go to Lempur village and do wildlife tracking from there. Luke had also suggested it, but not having any reports from there, I insisted on sticking to the old, well-traveled destinations of Kerinci and Tapan. I will note on that at the end of the report.

On the 3rd morning, after another early start, we were down from the mountain and met my new guide, Chei Mel, who would take me to Tapan for the next 4 nights. We did run into some guides who told us that they spotted a tiger just 5 days ago, near

Pos3 (camp cochoa?). Chei Mel also informed me that the tigress was very active in August, teaching her 2 cubs to hunt, so more people saw them on Kerinci during that time.

Many, if not most visitors to Tapan road go on day-tours from Kercik Tuo, getting there in the early hours of light, and leaving before dark. I've read about sightings of tigers, clouded Leopard, hog badgers and other species. I would recommend staying in Sungai Penuh, which is just 40 min from the campsite, which is also the ranger station, the entrance to Taman Nasional Kerinci-Seblat, and the start of Tapan Road. Sungai Penuh is larger and more civilized than Kercik Tuo. The guest house had equally hot water, super comfortable bed, TV, etc.

I thought I'd by spending 4 nights on Tapan Road I'd see tons of rare stuff people don't see because they don't spend their nights here. But once again, mammals were slow. Traffic is also an annoyance, especially when everyone honks around each turn, and yells "hello mister" and "how are you, mister" when they see a white person. Sometimes you get 15-20 minute breaks, but sometimes you get vehicles every minute or two, and most mammals have probably learned to stay away from the road. It's unfortunate, because the forest here is in amazing condition, the birds are plentiful, and the ecosystem seems to thrive. Also Chei Mel was even more enthusiastic, a great spotter, more experienced than Ighun, and wanted as much as I did to find the mammals. Her English was also very good, even better than Ighun's.

Well, on the first afternoon we did a Little bit of bird watching with *Temminck's Sunbird*, *fire-tufted* and *Black-browed barbets*, *verditer flycatcher*, *rhinoceros hornbills* and even a short attempt to call in a graceful pitta, which we did not succeed, and I cut it short to return back to mammals. Apparently searching for pittas and mammals conflict, and I wanted to try mammals.



For the next 3.5 days, we combined walking, driving, sitting over the river and waiting, during all hours of the day and at night. The problem was that the moon was rising early (though getting later by 40-50 minutes from day to day) and traffic would only slow down almost completely until 21:00-21:30. On Sunday night traffic didn't really stop until after 22:30-22:40, which was when I had to leave, and start driving towards the airport for tomorrow's flight.

The first night we saw **Small-toothed palm civet**, **black flying squirrel**, another unidentified **arboreal rat**, and a **Flying fox** by foot. We “mammaled” the ‘lower elevations’, from bridge 3



going up (600ish to 800ish m elevation). By car, continuing upwards, a **Masked palm civet** crossed the road, followed by a really big **rat**. But shortly after that, the moon was shining brightly again, while my eyes were setting... Especially when since I did not have a great night's sleep last night, as they accidentally situated my tent over a big tree root and I was too tired to have them move it, or move it myself.

Next morning we started late, around 10. After a well-deserved hot shower, great sleep, nice breakfast served to my room, and 2 cups of coffee, we were back on the road. We made it all the way down to the sign that you've passed from Jambi into West Sumatra, which is around 420m elevation. There were again tons of **Surilis**, even at the roadside, and some **siamangs** calling. Additionally, some **pig-tailed macaques**, **plantain squirrels**, **common treeshrews**, and tons of birds again. I kept scanning the trees across the valley, far from the road.. But didn't find anything of interest.



This afternoon, right as we decided to walk in the lower elevation, we were downpoured-on, and my shoes and other clothes have become soaking wet. At night, mammals came very slowly again, with a colony of **Large flying foxes**, a **colugo**, and a mammal which we didn't manage to identify before it disappeared. We mammaled the rest of the evening by car, giving up once the moon was again bright and shiny. The only thing to note during the drive was a green snake that was best identified as *trimeresurus popeorum*. Also, we had changed our vehicle that day, and spotlighting from the back seat was extremely uncomfortable - so in combination with not seeing much, I felt too tired to continue and we went straight to camp. We camped near the ranger station, and again - also here there was nowhere to wash yourself or even just your face to clean up from the sweat and humidity. Realizing that we were only 25-35 minutes from the guesthouse, I would ask to



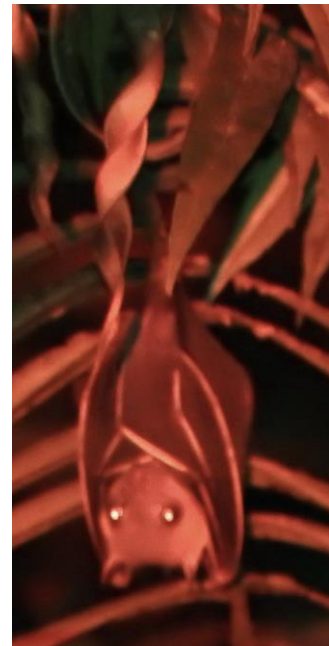


stay there the next night instead of camping again. Chei Mel cooked us a nice dinner, which I fell asleep before - woke up just to eat and fell right back asleep.

The next morning we staked a riverside hill after the 4th Bridge right before the Jambi/West Sumatra gate for like 40 minutes, only seeing more surili, macaques, treeshrews and squirrels, hearing siamangs, and seeing more *black&yellow broadbills*, *malkohas*, and others. We had lunch back at the ranger station, where after quickly photographing *Sumatran green pigeon* and *Black-browed Barbet*, I took a nap to prepare for a longer spotlighting session planned for tonight. After lunch, we did a lot of staking high over a river valley where the road is being reworked/widened, but saw nothing new as far as mammals. At one point I saw something running in the trees, which could have been a y-t marten or another giant squirrel, but I will never know. What did happen is a massive and dangerous landslide exactly right

where we were sitting. First it was just a few rocks here and there, so we didn't move, but then the entire cliff above the road started to crack and huge pieces were falling off, so we moved. It turned out to be a good decision, because we heard huge cracking later on, and then it turned out that the entire cliff collapsed onto the road and blocked it for the entire next day. That night we did a little more spotlighting on foot, which is the better strategy in my opinion on Tapan, and saw **island/common palm civet**, a bat that looks like a **Lesser Short-nosed fruit bat**, and not much else during the 3.5-or so-hour session. We were back at my hotel by 23:00ish, and I told them we can start later tomorrow so that they can rest well, too, and be energized for our last day.

So since the road was blocked, I expected less traffic, which I thought would play in our favor. Plus it was completely overcast.. But they managed to clear out the road by 15:00-16:00 based on the amount of non-stop traffic since then. We started actually with lunch at the ranger station, where a fucking douche bag had just shot 2 fire-tufted barbets, and had the audacity to ask us for a plastic bag. One of the barbets was still alive and was screaming. He had a shotgun, so I tried to contain my rudeness level to just "disappointed look of hatred and no response" when he smiled at me and said "hello mister, how are you?". I could imagine this idiot shooting and killing any pangolin, badger, or any small animal he would come across. I didn't understand why Chei Mel was so nice to him, giving him the bag he asked for. But then she told me she was recording him the entire time, wrote down his license plate, and will make a report. What a champ! This is how conservation still has a chance - with locals who care. She also told me she didn't think he could seriously injure a tiger or a sun bear with this weapon. Anyway, we did more walking along the upper parts of the road. I read somewhere that the lower elevations would be more productive, but Dewi saw his Sumatran tiger just 100m from the ranger station, and a binturong in that area, as well as a clouded Leopard over the stream on the second bridge. Chei Mel has

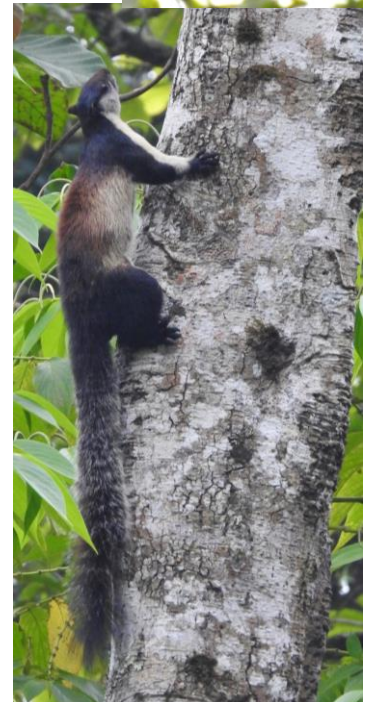
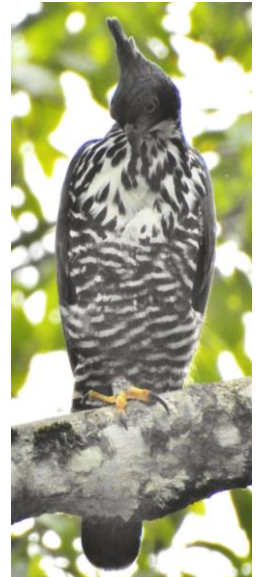


seen a sun bear when she was just scanning for birds, also in the upper elevations. So I think mammal watching there could be as good as anywhere else along the road.

We did more walking and saw the usual suspects. At one point we startled a small mammal on the side of the road, which kind of squeaked and made some movements. We walked back and waited for over 20 min in hopes that it would come onto the road, but it never did. I also used the mouth-on-the-back-of-the-hand squeaking technique, for a few seconds twice, but nothing. One thing we saw was a **cream-colored giant squirrel** calling loudly on the same tree and just meters away from a *Blyth's hawk-eagle*. After just letting them do their thing, we kept walking down the trail, getting too close to them. So the hawk-eagle flew to another tree. Then when we were way too close, the squirrel climbed higher up the tree and kept warning-calling. At that point I saw the hawk-eagle flying back to this tree, and I knew it would try to catch the now-perfectly positioned squirrel. A half-a-second fight and the squirrel was able to escape, with the hawk-eagle flying off, both making similar-pitched sounds. So that was cool. After the road opened up to traffic, it was super frustrating, with cars and bikes driving by us every minute or few minutes. This lasted way later than on the previous nights. Since this night was spotlighting until having to start driving towards Padang, I was in for a long night. Despite the constant traffic we saw: 1 **slow loris**, one very small, black&white flying squirrel, which must have been **Temminck's Flying Squirrel**, which I got a good look at it for a second and before it glided off. Later on we had a good encounter with a rather relaxed **masked palm civet**, and then a family of 4-5 **common palm civets**



including a couple really small, young ones. But it was too far up the tree above the road, and they kept moving, so I didn't get any good pictures. The final mammal of the night was an unidentified carnivore-looking animal that was again pretty high up the tree, and was smaller and moving more swiftly than the civets we saw. I have a couple things in mind, but I shouldn't make speculations, so it's just an unidentified animal, unfortunately. Around 11 we were back in Sungai Penuh for a quick dinner, and at 00:00 I was out in the road with the same driver who drove me to Kercik



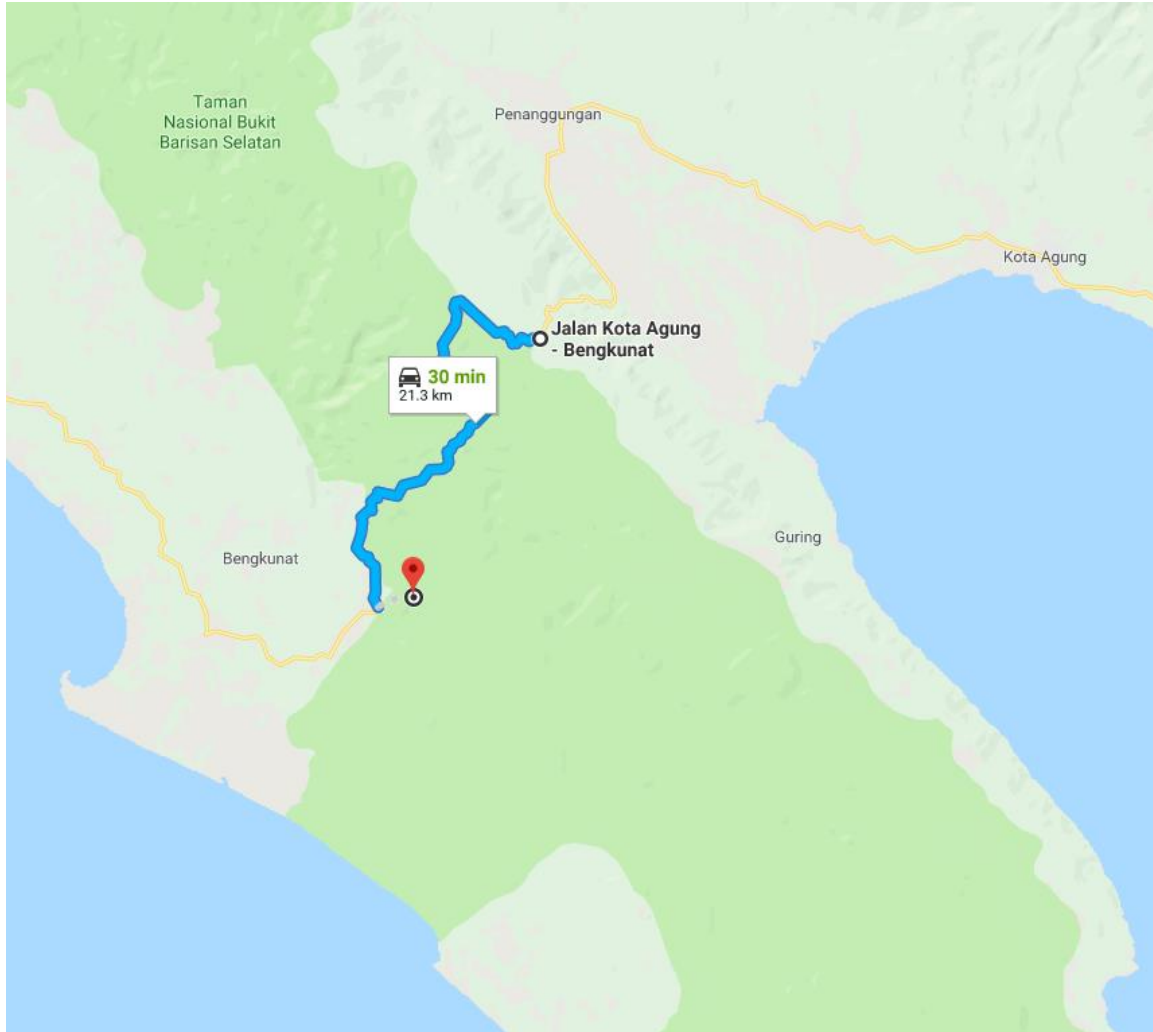
Tuo the first day. We drove all night with me trying to sleep in the back, but him with the widow open - chain smoking, freezing me to death as we drove through the mountains, and blasting music. But I figured it's more important that he stays awake, so whatever he needs to do. We got to the airport at 8:30am for a flight



The white tip of the tail of the masked palm civet is not visible in this picture, but it was clear. I'm pretty sure the ID is correct – but as always – I'm open to corrections.

Before the annotated list, I want to make a generalized note about Sumatran mammal watching: After having been to Way Kambas and Leuser, each with their operational challenges that put a serious damper on mammal watching, I think I found the next tour operator that will make mammal watching in Sumatra thrive like it should. Note that I, sadly, didn't see any of the rare animals on my list above. But that may be partly due to me being stubborn and insisting on the popular routes of Tapan and Kerinci's main trail (as opposed to other, more remote treks offered by Wild Sumatra), partly due to the season or the moon schedule, and mainly due to luck. The rain forest of Kerinci-Seblat is healthy, and Wild Sumatra knows where to take you. All the guides and drivers I had did a great job not smoking in the jungle, showed excellent knowledge of bird species and willingness to learn the mammals, and above all – enthusiasm and willingness to do whatever it takes, any hour of the day or night, to find mammals, including last-minute changes and requests. I wouldn't hesitate to take a week-long trek from the aforementioned Lempur village for wildlife with Wild Sumatra and their guides. It is along this trek that they recently took the only good photo of an Indonesian Mountain weasel in existence. I also have to be specifically thankful for them having spare spotlighting equipment after my strong LED-Lenser broke in an untimely manner, similar to what happened in the middle of the C.A.R. ☹️. Even after an already long day, and after a fruitless first hour of spotlighting from the vehicle, when I decided we should spotlight on foot, Chei Mel didn't just get out and start spotlighting because "I asked her to". No – she was very active, and found flying foxes and the colugo, and showed great interest in the animals and their identification. I'm positive that if

there had been golden cats and striped rabbits there, she would have found them. My only wish is for Wild Sumatra to extend their reach to Southern Sumatra, to Bukit Barisan Selatan, where the road leading up to Way Canguk should be at least as good as Tapan road, if not better (though it's shorter – see picture). On this road, both Vladimir Dinets and the American researcher I corresponded with, saw Sumatran Striped Rabbit. Also along this road, only 100m from the road, was the wallow or Rosa, a Sumatran Rhino that was captured for her own safety, and brought to Way Kambas's SRS for breeding. The pin represents the approximate location of Way Canguk, but I was told you couldn't find it without a guide and/or a ranger.



List of mammals:

Sulawesi bear cuscus, *Ailurops ursinus*

Large Flying Fox, *Pteropus vampyrus*

Lesser short-nosed fruit bat, *Cynopterus brachyotis*
bat sp. on Java

Small-toothed palm civet, *Arctogalidia trivirgata*

Masked Palm Civet, *Paguma larvata*

Asian Palm Civet, *Paradoxurus hermaphrodites*

North Sulawesi Babirusa, *Babirusa celebensis*

Celebes Warty pig, *Sus celebensis*
Rusa Deer, *Cervus timorensis*
Black flying squirrel, *Aeromys tephromelas*
Black-striped squirrel, *Callosciurus nigrovittatus*
Plantain Squirrel, *Callosciurus notatus*
Niobe ground squirrel, *Lariscus niobe*
Temminck's flying squirrel, *Petinomys setosus*
Whitish dwarf squirrel, *Prosciurillus leucomus*
Celebes dwarf squirrel, *Prosciurillus murinus*
Cream-colored Giant squirrel, *Ratufa affinis*
Low's squirrel, *Sundasciurus lowii*
Slender squirrel, *Sundasciurus tenuis*
*Mouse species from Kerinci Camp (see quote below)
Pygmy Treeshrew, *Tupaia minor*
Sunda flying lemur (Colugo), *Galeopterus variegatus*
Sunda slow loris, *Nycticebus coucang*
Spectral tarsier, *Tarsius tarsier*
Crab-eating macaque, *Macaca fascicularis*
Heck's macaque, *Macaca hecki*
Southern pig-tailed macaque, *Macaca nemestrina*
Celebes crested macaque, *Macaca nigra*
Sumatran surili, *Presbytis melalophos*
Javan lutung, *Trachypithecus auratus*
Siamang, *Symphalangus syndactylus*

*regarding the mouse from kerinci Campsite, I tried to identify it by using photos of mice from Kerinci, and I found the following quote, attached to a picture of a mouse that looks a lot like the one I saw: "Apparently, nobody realized that the friendly rats in the campsite on the summit of Mt. Talamau, Sumatra, are the island endemic Rattus Korinchi [only known from Mt. Talamau and Mt. Kerinci], reflecting how little we know about biodiversity". This is by Heru Handika, an Indonesian researcher. While I have no photographs of it, and while he's talking about Mt. Talamau and not Kerinci, this could be a similar situation.

Notable birds:

Tabon Scrubfowl
Red-billed partridge
Green Junglefowl – a single family near the parking of Ijen volcano
Salvadori's pheasant
Black kite
White-bellied sea eagle
Black eagle
Blythe's hawk-eagle

Sulawesi Hawk eagle
Barred rail
White-faced cuckoo-dove
Brown Cuckoo-dove
Stephan's emerald dove
barred dove
Sumatran green pigeon
Black-naped fruit dove
Oberholser's fruit dove (formerly maroon-chinned fruit-dove)
Green imperial pigeon
Dark-backed imperial pigeon
Silver-tipped imperial pigeon
Great hanging parrot
Ornate lorikeet
Yellow-breasted racket-tail
Blue-backed parrot
Yellow-billed Malkoha
Bay coucal
Ochre-bellied boobook
Sumatran trogon
Purple-winged roller
Green-backed kingfisher
Javan Kingfisher
Collared kingfisher
Sulawesi dwarf kingfisher
Blue eared kingfisher
Blue-tailed bee-eater
Chestnut-headed bee-eater
Rhinoceros hornbill
*Great hornbill - apparently heard frequently on kerinci (not actually seen by me)
Sulawesi dwarf hornbill
Red-knobbed hornbill
Wreathed hornbill (on the road at Ijen and on kerinci)
Fire-tufted barbet
Black-browed barbet
Coppersmith barbet
Ashy woodpecker
Long-tailed broadbill
Black-and-yellow broadbill
Sunda minivet
Scarlet minivet
Long-tailed shrike
Ashy drongo
Sulawesi drongo

Asian ferry bluebird
Snowy-browed
Verditer flycatcher
indigo flycatcher
Rufous-chested flycatcher
Blue-masked leafbird
Orange-bellied flowerpecker
Black-fronted flowerpekcker
Blood-breasted flowerpecker
Brown-throated sunbird
Olive-backed sunbird
Flame-breasted sunbird
Temminck's sunbird (*Aethopyga mystacalis*)
Javan Munia

Other interesting species:

Komodo Dragon
Water Monitor
Green Sea turtle
Cobra Species on Sulawesi
Pope's pit viper
Manta Ray

