

Birds, charming people, a quick marriage to an Islamic girl and a whole new perspective on roadkill in –

Indonesia

on the islands of Sulawesi, Bali, Halmahera, Ternate and Java

12th June to 10th July 2009

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The Plan

A Mr Wallace and a number of other naturalists cum line-drawers have famously sectioned off bits of Indonesia and a few other islands. This was an attempt to corral geographic areas that display a similar mix of flora and fauna grading from truly Continental Asian to the Wonderful World of Oz.

Our holiday was to spend time on Bali, west of Wallace's Line, Sulawesi, to the east of it, and Halmahera, east of Wallace's and another line as well. The wildlife in these areas is spectacular, has a high degree of endemism and searching for it promised be very rewarding.

Wildlife is not the only drawcard for Sulawesi, the island where we spent most of our time. Here there is stunning scenery and some world-class cultural attractions. These include Torajaland, where the local people have some confronting views on life and death, and the mysterious culture that left the amazing ~5000 year old megaliths in the central highlands.

The only other aspect of The Plan was to avoid getting caught between rival religious or ethnic groups. This turned out to be easy.

To move around on Sulawesi, Ternate and Halmahera we engaged the services of Adventurindo Tours (see entry below). Barry-Sean Virtue joined me for our ninth holiday together. We are still friends!

Itinerary (as executed) – many changes were made from the original itinerary as we went along. Most of the words here are copied from the ground agent's notes, although some have been severely interfered with by me....

General comments on sites visited are included in the Diary section (below).

Day 1, June 12 2009

Depart Sydney 1000 on Garuda GA 715. Arrive Denpasar 1430. Catch taxi to Bali Barat NP. Meet Heri, our guide. Stay at national park accommodation near Gilimanuk.

Day 2, June 13

At Bali Barat NP with Herykusuma Negara (Bali Barat ranger) as guide. Stay at Bali Starling Release Centre.

Day 3, June 14

At Bali Barat NP.

Day 4, June 15

Visit Baluran NP on Java to see green peafowl and search for banteng.

Day 5, June 16

Return to Denpasar. Stay at the Whiterose Hotel – Legian St, Kuta. Visit Kuta Beach and buy pirate DVDs

Day 6, June 17

Fly to Makassar at 0900 on GA 620, arriving at 1015.

Meet Jefry from Adventurindo Tours at Hasanuddin Airport Makassar. Then take approx. 8 hours scenic drive to Tana Toraja with many photo-stops en route, passing through the Buginese villages with their typical wooden houses. Lunch will be served at a seafood restaurant in Pare-Pare. In the afternoon stop on the Puncak Lakawan for a coffee break while enjoying the wonderful view of *Mount Buttukabobong*. In the afternoon arrive in Rantepao. Dinner and stay overnight at Toraja Prince Hotel.

Day 7, June 18

Full day Tana Toraja tour. After breakfast, we will visit the hanging graves of Lemo with its Tau-Tau effigies. Then to Kambira where we can find the peculiar baby graves in the trees. Onwards we will explore the architecture of Tongkonan houses in Ketekesu village and Londa, which is a natural grave with entombed deceased. Lunch will be served at a restaurant overlooking Rantepao. In the afternoon we will be overwhelmed by all kinds of stuff. Then back to the hotel with beer we bought more cheaply in town and get on it before dinner and overnight stay.

Day 8, June 19

Drive to Pendolo via Palopo. The road between Tana Toraja to Palopo offers us many spectacular views and a birding stop on a pretty well forested mountain. Lunch en route. In the afternoon, drive to western shore of Lake Poso and stay at Siuri Cottages.

Day 9, June 20

Full day around Lake Poso, visiting Tentena, Saluopa Waterfall and vast numbers of young women. Stay at Siuri Cottages.

Day 10, June 21

After breakfast, drive to Palu. In the afternoon, arrive in some clown's really hot homestay south of Palu. Meet our extraordinary local guide there.

Day 11, June 22

After breakfast we will drive into Lore Lindu National Park, birding along the way and camping at Lake Tambing.

Day 12, June 23

Walk the Anaso Trail in the morning before visiting the Pokekea Megaliths. Camp near a river at Doda.

Day 13, June 24

Birding around Doda before returning to Lake Tambing and camping there.

Day 14, June 25

Birding around Lake Tambing before visiting what used to be the birding area of Kamarora. Marvel at our guide's skills before moving on to Palu. Overnight at the Sentral (sic) Hotel, Palu.

Day 15, June 26

Head north, stopping for birding and mammals along the Palu to Taboli Road. Drive as far north as possible before it gets dark, as the road is utter crap. Stay in a dump of a hotel at Marisa.

Day 16, June 27

A long driving day to Doloduo where we stay at the Tante Min Homestay.

Day 17, June 28

Early in the morning transfer to the Tambun Maleo Nesting Site, you'll have half day birding in this area. An open air breakfast will be served by our guide on the site. Lunch at the homestay. In the afternoon birding at Torout area. Dinner and stay overnight at the Tante Min Homestay.

Day 18, June 29

After breakfast drive to Singsingon and birding in this area. Stay at Ranger's homestay. Night walk searching for owls.

Day 19, June 30

After breakfast drive to Danau Moat, enjoying the beautiful panorama surroundings of the lake and breathe the fresh air of Modinding highland. Lunch at the local restaurant. After lunch continue driving around 5 hours to Tomohon. Late afternoon arrive in Tomohon, check-in at Onong's Palace and dinner.

Day 20, July 1

Full day birding around Minahasa highlands includes hike up to volcano mountain. Lunch at the local restaurant. After lunch transfer to Tangkoko, check-in at Tangkoko Lodge.

Day 21, July 2

Full day birding in the Tangkoko Nature Reserve and here you will be accompanied by bird-watching guide who has sharp eyes to spot the birds and has talent for birding.

Day 22, July 3

Full day to explore the birding in the Tangkoko Nature Reserve and here you will be accompanied by bird-watching guide who has sharp eyes to spot the birds and has talent for birding. Visit a mangrove swamp in the rain but see some good birds anyway.

Day 23, July 4

After breakfast transfer to Manado, check in Manado Quality Hotel (Manado's best) and free for your own leisure.

Day 24, July 5

We will travel by air to Ternate, onwards via a speedboat to Sidangoli. Lunch at Sidangoli before birding around Kali Batu Putih and Anu's Place before camping there.

Day 25, July 6

We will arise early morning, birding along the path through dense forest for seeing Standard wing paradise bird. Keep driving slowly to Lame and Tobelo, check-in at local hotel.

Day 26, July 7

Return to Sidangoli, birding along the way. Stay at the only hotel in Sidangoli with air conditioning.

Day 27, July 8

After breakfast birding around Sidangoli before a speedboat return to Ternate. Visit crater lake on far side of the island to search for great-billed parrot. Boulevard Hotel for overnight.

Day 28, July 9

Transfer to the airport for return flight to Manado. Transfer to Manado Quality Hotel. Free Program.

Day 29, July 10

After breakfast we will transfer you to the airport for your next destination.

Fly to Makassar on GA 603 at 1330

Fly to Denpasar on GA 621 at 1630

Fly to Sydney on GA 714 at 2340

Adventurindo Tours

We booked through these guys after finding them on the internet. I had earlier sent identical emails to half a dozen or so companies that appeared to offer wildlife tours but Adventurindo was the only company that replied. Maybe the others catered for those seeking wildlife that knows its way around a bucket of Dettol and the latest massage techniques. I'll never know.

The tour and price that Adventurindo offered was very reasonable, and as they appeared to be a legitimate company we booked with them. The person on the other end of the computer – Jefry Rompis – was also our principal guide. The company works on the principle that you have one point of contact for the tour from the initial enquiry through to delivery at the airport on your way home. It seems to work. Whilst Jefry was an accomplished guide and driver he was ably assisted by another driver / guide, Yosua Noya. At each wildlife or cultural site specialist local guides would join us for a day or maybe several days depending on the place.

Our vehicle was a fairly new Toyota van that had good tyres, air-con and other features and was kept clean and in perfect mechanical condition.

We were very pleased with Adventurindo. They provided exceptional service and value for money. Importantly we were able to change our itinerary as we went to take into account road conditions, crappy weather (what dry season??), or ideas that were developed as we went along.

Jefry and Yosua were perfect company. Nothing was ever a problem for them and they maintained the same demeanour throughout. They could and did answer any question we threw at them, including the best way to spice a dog, how to avoid getting into a fight with a jealous husband and why it is a good idea to have a sense of direction if you are using local guides in Lore Lindu. No subject was taboo, I never once heard either of them swear, and they never ever got drunk or slept in. They generally wanted us up to go birding at a time earlier than we would have suggested! Great guys – well done.

I have only one minor criticism. We were told that if we changed our tour start date from the one we originally wanted, we would have the services of their best birdwatching guide throughout, who turned out to be the very competent Nurlin Djuni. But the freelance Nurlin got another job for much of the time of our visit so we did not have his excellent services. I don't know what could have been done about this....

I would recommend Adventurindo Tours to anyone planning a holiday in Sulawesi, birding or otherwise. You can contact them at - info@sulawesitour.com

Wildlife (see also mammal and bird lists at the end of the report)

Along with trip reports from various birders, we used the excellent *Birds of Wallacea* by Bishop and Coates. For mammals we relied on the knowledge of our guides and locally sourced material in Indonesia. We managed to sort out almost all the mammals we spotted.

We identified 256 different birds and 20 mammals.

Mammals

We did well with mammals on Bali / Java despite dipping on banteng and Javan pangolin. Best were a mysterious and unidentified cat, ebony leaf-monkey, Sunda porcupine and Javan mongoose.

On Sulawesi we had not planned on chasing babirusa so none were seen in the wild. We thought we were some sort of chance of seeing anoa but we arrived a number of years too late it appears. These poor things are hunted mercilessly and are now rarely seen and almost never seen accidentally, as they might have been just ten years earlier.

Mammals seen in Sulawesi included three of the seven macaques (moor, Heck's and Celebes crested), which look and behave more like baboons, not like the scumbag Asian lot. Dian's and Sulawesi (aka spectral) tarsiers and bear cuscus were all seen well. Bear cuscus is oddly diurnal. I wondered if sharing the forest with monkeys was the cause of this?

My only close wildlife interaction was when a large male Celebes crested macaque tried to push me over as it walked past me in Tangkoko – cheeky bugger! Come to think of it I did get licked by a babirusa, but I prefer not to talk about it.

On Halmahera there is no obvious diurnal mammal fauna and my sightings were restricted to a lone but rather marvellous and close masked fruit bat. A couple of cuscus are possible but I reckon they would be pretty hard. Most accessible forest on Halmahera is pretty much trashed.

Birds and guides

We started our trip on Bali. Here we had the services of Herykusuma Negara (“Heri”), a ranger and wildlife enthusiast. Heri offered us a three day “All of Bali Barat NP Package” for \$US100 per person including guiding and transport but not food or accommodation. This was great value and a fraction of the cost of trips offered over the internet. Heri is a ranger at Bali Barat and knows his birds. He can get you to places in the park – like overnight at the Bali Starling Release Centre – that you might otherwise struggle to visit. We were offered the opportunity to stay at the centre, producing some great bird and mammal sightings aside from the Bali starlings, which are pretty much guaranteed.

Heri was happy to start and finish each day before sunrise and after sunset and is highly recommended. You’d be nuts not to contact him on balibarat_nationalpark@yahoo.co.id.

Best birds seen were green junglefowl, green peafowl (during a brief trip to Java), black-winged starling and Bali starling. We managed 82 others during our stay.

For mine there were two other “must see” birds – one on Sulawesi, the maleo, and one on Halmahera, Wallace’s standardwing (a bird of paradise). We were lucky and managed both birds before sunrise on our first attempts! Four to six maleo crashed about at their nesting site for our visit to Tambun despite a large Japanese group spending the previous two days at the site without seeing a single bird! Pity. A similar number of male standardwing went quite silly at their lek, to be largely ignored by one or two females.

We missed many birds, particularly at Lore Lindu and Tangkoko, mainly due to the weather or by having guides that ran interference. Our guide in Lore Lindu was a nice person but past his “use-by” date as a guide. It was far more productive to contrive to leave him behind. I won’t name him here because he really is a worthwhile person but if you wish to know his name you can email me (steveas@tpg.com.au). Our guide in Tangkoko, Dinan, is also a great bloke who found us a number of key birds and tried his absolute best for us but I think that Bobby at Tangkoko Lodge is much better. Bobby was supposed to guide us but bailed when some birders with a higher profile arrived. I understand his position but....

The only world-class birding guide we had was Nurlin Djuni. He can be contacted through Adventurindo Tours - info@sulawesitour.com. Nurlin joined us for our few days on Halmahera and a day on Ternate. He helped us find most of our target birds fairly quickly and I had the feeling that any extra days on Halmahera would have been frustratingly slow in terms of new birds found.

On the whole we spotted a great range of really interesting birds, especially given the nature of the birding – mostly in wet forests in an area where the birds are pretty bloody scared of people, and, lets face it, on islands - where the number of species is always lower.

Insects (annoying / life threatening)

There's not much in the way of malaria in Sulawesi – at least when we were there anyway - but at Tangkoko there are things you cannot see that bite you pretty much everywhere but particularly on your feet. Every local “expert” had a different name for the insects responsible. I think it is just as likely that it is an ancient curse and not an insect at all. This would better explain the distribution of the “bite marks” which seem unrelated to the location of clothing or insect repellent. So wearing a wetsuit or birding from a helicopter may not be helpful as the owner of the curse would surely have considered such things.

The attractive red skin patterns appear soon after your first Tangkoko forest experience and will serve to entertain for days, or, in my case, weeks. After I'd joyfully scratched the tops off the original so-called bites I crammed some secondary infections into the holes created. These eventually joined hands. After a few days the infections got bored and started to travel up my legs. Although the amputation of limbs does not necessarily mean the end of a useful life, in my case this wasn't necessary as I switched diets from one based on alcohol to a penicillin-based one bought from a Manado chemist.

Outside of the Tangkoko Curse area all of the insects have been drastically reduced by hunting. If you see any I am certain that the local people would love any tips. I am still getting my head around what would remain of a small moth after it had been shot.

There were no annoying insects on Bali – shorts, T-shirts and thongs are okay.

Insects (not annoying / life threatening)

There are birdwing butterflies on Halmahera and other butterflies and nocturnal moths throughout. These are all clearly poisonous so don't try to eat them.

Food

The food was quite good without being exciting. None of it tried to move around on, or leave our plates. There was enough variety to keep it interesting. I never realised that mammals had so many internal body parts. I pointed at these and ignored them.

It should be noted that anything that can be digested in some way is considered to be food in Sulawesi. Dogs are not merely pets, or, in many cases, not pets at all. The most flea-bitten 100% mangy miserable mutt is a future banquet guest. Many of these hairless “cattle dogs” have the appearance of forlorn slothful warthogs but are not nearly as good-looking.

Road-kill has never been known to go rotten on the side of the road. Dogs, cats, rats, chickens, frogs, two-toed sloths, polar bears or anything else unfortunate enough to get barrelled on the road will bring joy to someone. The locals are very pragmatic and

unapologetic about this. They'd love Australian roads. WIRES would never get a phone call.

I returned from a walk one day to find our staff enthusiastically roasting a road-killed rat over the gas burner. Barry-Sean was busily taking photos and getting preparation tips. I wandered off to try to see some more birds. I didn't see what happened to the rat in the end. Maybe.....

Hygiene in restaurants is pretty average and refrigeration is a novelty in some areas. We both suffered meltdowns on a couple of occasions and in Barry-Sean's case this lasted for some days.

Tropical fruits were varied, inexpensive and readily available from roadside stalls.

Indonesian people

Before leaving on this, my first trip to Indonesia, I hadn't really given much thought to the people we would meet. I didn't expect any horrific things to happen, like those the Australian Government Travel website warns about, but I thought some of the people in areas we were to visit might have been a little cool to westerners. I could not have been more wrong.

The most popular recreation for Indonesians is to sit, or more correctly lounge, in front of their houses and watch the road. So we ended up enjoying the slow pace of road travel just so we could wave to the people we passed. "Hullo mister" was the standard response but "I love you", or variations on that theme (and fortunately mostly from women) were not uncommon. The expressions of love and friendship were always accompanied by a big smile and an enthusiastic wave. Jefry told us that the reaction was just for us. He said he would have soon managed a fight if he had waved or said hello to somebody's wife or girlfriend. I prefer to think that the girls we spotted were only human.

The islands we visited had a mix of people that believed in christian, moslem or hindu gobbledegook. (*something funny about Microsoft Word – it allows uncapitalised "hindu" at the first attempt, it corrects "christian" once and then gives up, but it tried three times to capitalise "moslem"*). Anyway, I expected that the actions or reactions of these groups to differ, but this was not the case. The people were simply outstanding and wonderful. We never had an issue with anyone over anything and always felt entirely safe. Although Jefry and Yosua would sometimes centrally lock the car's doors when in big towns, I don't know whether this was really necessary at the time of our visit.

Indonesian police were rarely seen and when they were – mainly at random checkpoints on roads - they were friendly, polite and efficient.

We figured that the folk we met (excepting Kutans – *a new word here*) had not had much contact with white monkeys so they had no idea of what to do with them. This means that robbery isn't likely to happen because no pattern of behaviour of westerners has been established, and there are no traditional recipes for cooking them.

Nobody ever asked us for anything nor did they try to offer us unwanted services, except, of course, on Bali where it is a government requirement.

I cannot think of a single negative thing to say about any of the people we met or interacted with. But collectively – I wish they'd stop killing everything.

Religion in Indonesia

Indonesian law dictates that you have to have a religion to legally reside in Indonesia. There is a restricted choice that does not include Jedi Knights or the Church of the Second Coming of the Great Prophet Zarquon or any of the other interesting religions. Although on reflection, catholicism and islam are pretty interesting.

The Arms Race

In northern Sulawesi driving is often interrupted by road-blocks. Here religious zealots wave buckets at vehicles hoping to collect money for churches or mosques. A scrum of devotees would be assisted by a similar group at a roadside desk and PA system who gave a running commentary on donations received. The odd thing about all this is that about 10% of all buildings are houses of worship and in some villages this figure is higher. Given the size of the things, the percentage of building materials that becomes a church or mosque is higher still. Barry-Sean counted five large churches within 100 metres in one small village. There is an extra-ordinary oversupply of space in these structures and yet they build more – many more.

Soon there will be no room or need for houses. Everyone will have their own personal house of worship. What happens then? End of days?

Hotels

Our digs ranged from four star luxury in Manado to tent / forest / rain in Lore Lindu. There was everything in between including homestays and “no star” hotels in small towns. One feature of many of the hotels' rooms was a total lack of windows. I don't know whether this was to prevent guests from escaping or to stop people looking in or out. The impact on us was to hope that the air-conditioning kept working. If it died then presumably so did we.

Another aspect of many hotel rooms was the absence of twin beds. We were often faced with a double bed. I have no evidence that all Indonesians are gay but there is plenty of opportunity in hotels for them to test any tendencies in this area. I prefer not to cuddle up to Barry-Sean and no doubt this made him happy as well. Luckily we always managed to procure an extra mattress to throw on the floor.

Hotel bathrooms have long fascinated me. There is really only so many things you can do in a bathroom so why are there so many millions of different designs? Western style toilets were the norm in the places we stayed but many had no flushing mechanisms. Sometimes there was a bucket but this did not presume there was any water to put in it. One place had

no bucket at all but just a simple hose coming from the wall. Flush you bastard. And the weather determined that Sulawesi is not a place where you complain about the lack of hot water – sometimes the cold water was too warm.

It is hard to generalise about the accommodation but all of it was safe and hotel managers and staff were always cheerful and obliging. It should be remembered that there is not much tourism, domestic or otherwise, in most of Sulawesi, so accommodation options are often rather limited.

Weather

We timed our trip to coincide with the middle of the dry season. It rained almost every day, sometimes torrentially. We lost a bit of time to this illusory dry season wetness, particularly in Lore Lindu but it was more of a nuisance than a nightmare.

It was stiflingly hot in the lowlands with humidity you could swim in. If there was any dirt in the air the locals could just chuck seeds into it and pick fruit on the way down. In the lowlands it was around 31 degrees every day with 99% humidity. It was quite pleasant between sunrise and 0615 and annoying after that.

In mountainous areas the temperatures were noticeably lower and it could be quite cool at night. Lovely.

Beer and Wine etc

A miserable report card here. Aside from the restricted choice of beer in Kuta, Bali (which is really a suburb of Sydney anyway – Bali that is, not just Kuta), the only beer commonly available is Bintang, which describes itself as a pilsener but could be anything. One thing's for sure – although Bintang is mighty boring, it wins hands down when there is nothing else. The price of this brew varied wildly dependent on location and the local religious persuasion. Cold Bintang was much harder to find than the tropically warm stuff. Quite depressing really.

Indonesians don't do wine.

Roads and traffic

The state of the rural roads is desperately bad. They are not maintained much and even less so in christian areas (apparently). Long driving days could see average speeds as high as the low 30s. Awful. Sometimes you would get a few hundred metres or so of flat pothole free tarmac and the thought might creep into your head that the worst of it was over. But this was always short-lived. There are no overtaking lanes whatsoever and the lane widths are so narrow that the cars have evolved narrowness to fit on them.

Happily for us, our two drivers were very sensible and professional in their driving and they showed a high degree of care for the vehicle and its occupants. How they avoided

killing anything is a miracle at the higher end of the scale. If I had been driving there would have been creeping carnage and village feasts along the length of Sulawesi.

Indonesians are even more proficient than the Chinese in the overuse of car horns. An extended blast greets everything, living or dead, whether the being or object is aware of the vehicle's existence or not. And if you are a pedestrian desperately trying to avoid having your ears assaulted then there is no escape. If you signal the driver / rider that you know he or she has been seen, you get an extra long blast in recognition of your spotting skills.

The ownership of small capacity motorcycles reaches its peak in Indonesia and nowhere is this more evident than on Bali. Bikes outnumber all other forms of transport by ten to one. These things collect in vast plagues at traffic signals where any cars soon become marooned.

We spotted a few accidents during our stay and they all involved bikes.

Scenery

The scenery in Indonesia is continuous and sometimes quite spectacular. The geology is varied with limestone outcrops in some areas and volcanoes in others, guaranteeing a good mix of landscapes for the hordes of local people to try to bugger up. Human scenery is above average with happy smiling villagers and interesting agriculture, housing and fishing craft. As you are never too far from the sea the scenery changes quite regularly. The sea around most Indonesian islands is ironically very clear and still relatively fishy.

The Indonesian Government

For mine the Indonesian Government is a major and tragic joke. And this isn't just because my first two religious choices were not available for use. The country and the provision of services are based almost entirely on corruption. I understand that if you wish to be a "civil servant" you need to have a substantial war chest to pay the necessary bribes to overcome a total lack of skill, knowledge or ability at the "interview" stage. The first thing the successful applicant then needs to do is to set up a business model based on recouping their investment from the selection process. I met a civil servant on Halmahera. When he told me his job I asked him "Oh, so you're the one that collects all the bribes". "That's right" he replied with big silly grin on his face.

So not much happens. The coconuts and rice largely grow themselves and this allows the people heaps of time to make babies and sit around smiling at passing tourists. Apathy is at high levels. There was a presidential election during our visit but nobody we spoke to were going to bother to vote – because it made no difference to anything anyway. Now the sad thing about all of this is the state of the environment (see below). The government has laws that are designed (I think) to protect the environment but many of these laws are rarely enforced. All they achieve is to

provide more opportunities for the collection of bribes. For example, it is often the national park staff who manage the logging and hunting in national parks.

The State of the Environment

There are still large forested areas on Sulawesi, or so I thought while being driven the length of it. From the road there were always lovely big trees on the hills in the distance so I assumed that much of the island's deforestation might have been confined to a corridor along roadways. However flying from Manado to Makassar changed my view. It was clear that there wasn't much forest that had not been interfered with or removed entirely. Apparently this has happened relatively quickly. I would like to be more positive about the state of the forests but this cannot be. I had read other birders' trip reports from trips only five or so years earlier. They described vast wildlife-filled forests where now there is nothing but crops, people and villages – and this all within national parks!!

Ironically the most obvious deforestation is within the national parks. Outside of them it appeared that logging was more targeted to particular trees. Our guides gave us no reason to be optimistic and they were themselves very sad about what was happening.

The hunting of everything is culturally ingrained. We were told that the anoa (a type of small forest cattle) was regularly seen just ten years earlier and some birders report seeing them wandering across roads. Those days are gone. Other large mammals are going the same way. There are said to be less than 300 babirusa left in the wild, and most of these are in the one place. They have probably suffered the most dramatic population crash of any large tropical mammal. As a group of rifle-touting pedestrians passed us I asked Jeffrey what they would be hoping to shoot. He replied "birds, lizards, fruit, anything".

Every country has wildlife and forest protection problems – I know Australia certainly has - but in most countries at least the core areas of national parks are pretty safe. Not so in the places we visited in Indonesia and I am told it is far worse on some of the other islands, especially Kalimantan on Borneo.

We had read that Tangkoko Nature Reserve was the best-protected reserve on Sulawesi. It is now a first rate joke. Good facilities have fallen into disuse and hunting is on the rise. The staff lay around smoking and putting their hand out for entry fees. They then go back to sleep. At night the place is crawling with people. I walked past the unmanned and unlocked entry gate just like everybody else.

If you want to see Indonesian wildlife, now would be a good time to go.

Diary

Day 1 - Friday 12 June 2009

My ex-brother-in-law, Greg-roy, took us to the airport on a cold Sydney morning for our 1000 Garuda A330-300 flight to Denpasar, Bali. We considered going to the airport by train but wondered what we would do with all the warm clothing once we got on the plane? The check-in wasn't all smooth sailing with the room temperature IQ check-in chap having to go to the service desk to clarify my booking. I just love that.

At this, the time of the "global financial crisis" the flight was full. The other participants on board the world's worst performing aircraft type and on the world's worst performing international airline were, predictably, a mix of surfers, returning Balinese and fat middle-aged bleached hair Aussie matrons hoping to find somebody in Kuta drunk enough to mate with.

I had the misfortune of having someone's child sitting in the seat behind me. It may have been the offspring of one of the adults nearby but as they all looked like Bali regulars they would need a DNA kit to establish whose monster it was, if in fact it was one of theirs at all. This future NRL forward kept kneeling me in the back until a well-timed and well-placed elbow caused a "child rotation event". Otherwise the family may have found themselves paying for accommodation they didn't need.

Other than that the flight was smooth with no seat belt warnings, good in-flight service and otherwise well-behaved passengers.

We arrived in Denpasar just before the scheduled 1430. As this was at the time of the swine flu epidemic I was worried that my head cold might have aroused the interest of the cameraman looking for hot people.....

We paid for our visa, grabbed our bags, interrogated a Commonwealth Bank ATM and entered the domain of placard-carrying taxi drivers and touts.

Our first destination – Bali Barat National Park – is as far as you can get from the airport and still be on Bali. We wanted to get to the park before it got too late so we handed over \$US70 to a nice man with a uniform and hopped into his fairly new airport taxi.

Our driver, Norman, was cheerful and drove like a lunatic, just like taxi drivers everywhere. This meant he was driving more sanely than anyone else on the road. The road was of the long and winding variety and consisted mostly of motorcycles. We saw nobody die this day but the prospect of this kept us alert. It is terribly bad luck to expire on the first day of your holiday.

It took an hour to get the taxi out of the capital city, another hour to get it out of third gear and yet another hour to get into top gear. Roadside humanity was more or less continuous and although we had no opportunities to overtake we managed to pass lots of other traffic anyway.

It was dark when we arrived at the national park accommodation just near the town of Gilimanuk. Heri, a park ranger, was supposed to meet us there but he was nowhere to be seen. In my search for him I scared the crap out of a lady feeding her kids in her kitchen. She seemed to be the only one around the park office area. She called Heri on her mobile phone. He arrived shortly thereafter with a shocked look on his face. He had the dates wrong and I carried a piece of paper to prove it. Much embarrassment, him.

We were weary and dehydrated from cheating death on an airplane and in a taxi and could only think of two things - with both of them called "beer". Heri was more interested in talking bird. We sorted a program for the next couple of days and then hopped onto two motorcycles with Heri and his assistant Boneng and sped into Gilimanuk for a feed and a brew.

It seemed rather surreal to be sitting in the smallest restaurant on earth (seating just four), eating delicious food in tropical heat and being assaulted by drivel coming from the nearby mosque on the same day that we could have frozen to death in Sydney. I then stupidly entered the whole chili challenge competition. I came second.

We stayed in what is almost luxury accommodation at the park office, just three kilometers from Gilimanuk and in tree-filled grounds fronting the Bali Strait. We were told that the rooms were \$US30 per night. We foolishly assumed that they would have twin beds but this was not the case. The gods shone on us as we looked shocked, mumbled a bit, walked in small radius circles and started talking about other options. The staff offered us a second room for an extra five dollars. Deal.

After dinner there was a welcoming scrum of rusa deer outside our room, thus enabling me to "tick" Royal National Park's second biggest pest.

Day 2 – 13th June 2009

At 0400 I was wide awake and ready to go. It was a pity that breakfast wasn't due until 0530. Shortly before sunrise Heri and I, and Boneng and Barry-Sean found ourselves back on the rear of a pair of Honda 125s heading towards Gilimanuk Bay. Here we met a boatman and his small out-rigged wooden fishing boat for a tour of the bay's mangrove and shorebird habitats. This was just wonderful. Best birds seen were cerulean kingfishers, beach thick-knees, lesser adjutants, black-naped terns, great-billed heron, lemon-bellied white-eyes and an assortment of other list fillers.

By mid-morning we had seen coconut? ground-squirrel, scarlet-headed flowerpecker and racquet-tailed treepie. But the day was to grow more interesting.

After a typical Asian lunch of rice, vegetables and fried chicken we were back on the bikes and exploring a rainforest gully site while searching for Javan kingfisher. It must be said that this bird is quite easily seen on power-lines and sticks in rice fields elsewhere on the island. We managed crappy in-flight views of this bird in the rainforest but managed a great mix of other birds and mammals in and around a fruiting fig tree. Here we watched an ebony leaf-monkey, long-tailed macaques, giant

squirrel, barking deer, grey-cheeked green-pigeon, green imperial pigeon and Oriental pied hornbill.

Our next stop was the Manjungan Resort, which has been built within the national park. This was achieved with much greasing of palms and has been heavily criticized by some tourists. I disagree. The impact of any “resort” on the environment is not trivial but in Indonesia and indeed in this case it means a very high level of protection for any wildlife anywhere near it. Barking deer and green junglefowl were abundant and we easily saw the first of our Bali starlings here after we heard their calls over the sound of the motorcycles. We had a quick cold one at the resort before the adventure continued, in a more extreme way.

I had gradually become comfortable with being on the back of a motorbike – something that does not come easily given my lack of experience in these things. Being on the back of a bike trying to speed through a mangrove swamp that featured pointy limestone bits, lots of dead and alive mangroves and more than a little mud was never anticipated. I had to get or fall off a few times when the bike refused to play. Boneng, who is half my size, had trouble controlling the bike with most of the weight behind him. Death was unlikely because of our low speed and soft mud.

Our arrival at Brumbun Bay, “The Last Home of the Bali Starling”, was just after dark. This site is superbly located on a small bay with interesting vegetation all around. We were assigned a simple open elevated shelter. A pair of near-new mattresses were produced, no doubt reducing the comfort of their usual owners. A simple but welcome meal preceded a short spotlighting session.

Spotlighting was rewarding. Wild boar and rusa deer were very common and Heri promised me that a cat came sniffing around for rats that profited from the large Bali starling aviary in the grounds. Sure enough, a cat did turn up, but it was in long grass and I managed only head on and then tail-on views of a house cat sized thing with bright red eyes and a relatively long woolly tail as it scarpered into the mangroves after briefly considering climbing a tree. It was certainly not a house cat (they haven’t been seen at Brumbun Bay), nor a mongoose. Heri insisted it was a marbled cat and said it was regularly seen. Sadly marbled cat is not said to be on Bali – so I’m not sure about what it was. Leopard cat also occur nearby.

A lingering cold did not prevent me from reducing my stock of Highland Park 12 y.o.

Day 3 – 14th June 2009

Most of the camp workers were up all night drinking arak. I’m glad I wasn’t offered any. From what I heard it would have ruined my ability to sing.

Bali starlings were all around us as we went on a “poacher patrol”, resplendent with automatic weapons and a stick. Perhaps the stick was for prodding the bodies after they had been aerated? Eventually, and not without some effort we managed to see a couple of black-winged starlings. These are smaller than poachers and do not require to be shot. Actually they are a rather pretty bird, but this was before we went to Sulawesi to see how spectacular starlings and their kin can really look.

After breakfast we crossed to Menjangan Island to search for Javan plover but we had no luck. Black-naped terns and a sole brown booby were seen.

We signed up again for the Mangrove Challenge and were soon back in Gilimanuk for lunch. We rested in our room for a couple of hours before exploring a few sites along the road to Denpasar. We ended up on a road that goes to the top of a mountain that has a telecom tower. The birding was unbelievably slow but the site showed excellent potential. We eventually found a pair of black-naped fruit-doves – a new bird for Bali Barat NP.

After dinner and a short but unrewarding pangolin hunt in the grounds of the accommodation, we crashed.

Day 4 – 15th June 2009

Heri suggested that a trip to Baluran National Park on Java might produce banteng and green peafowl. At 0430 I spotlit two Sunda porcupines in the park office grounds before our smiling and chirpy driver, Eko, arrived in his Pajero 4WD. Eko took us and his car onto a ferry for the crossing to Java. We crossed the straits quickly enough but the ferry took 45 minutes to find a place to dock.

The national park wasn't very far away and within the first two minutes we had seen ebony leaf-monkeys and Javan mongoose. Several green peafowl and large numbers of green junglefowl soon followed.

The banteng site was a tale of woe. The resident ranger told us that their numbers had been much reduced (to 35 animals) by Asian wild dogs and that the banteng had become nocturnal in open areas as a result. We managed to see 0% of them.

Aside from the peafowl, the best of the birds were ruddy cuckoo-dove, black-winged starling and barred buttonquail. Rusa deer numbered in the hundreds. Sadly the park is a solid mass of introduced weeds – both woody and otherwise. The vegetation looked horrible.

We decided to go back to Bali and spend more time on the “telecom” mountain. We lunched on Java and caught the ferry back across the rather treacherous straits. Old ferries, very strong currents, lots of shipping, wind and the shortage of docks made for an interesting and indirect journey. Our staff closed the tinted windows of our car for a customs and police inspection at Gilimanuk – apparently it was illegal to transport tourists in the vehicle we were in.

Our walk down the mountain was disappointing with little of anything being seen. Black-thighed falconet was the best.

Heri and Boneng went to town and came back later with some takeaway nasi goreng while the sun set over Java. After dinner we went pangolin hunting. This animal is apparently fairly common and Heri was surprised when we failed to find any. You could certainly see where they had been.

Day 5 – 16th June 2009

After an indifferent night's sleep I woke with my head cold – and the music from a Status Quo song - remarkably intact.

We checked out of Bali Barat after paying some money to a nice man whose name I never understood. He may have been associated with the national park but we'll never know for sure. We wandered across the road and jumped onto an aged short-arse bus bound for Denpasar. It had a top speed of about 40km/h and stopped every few metres to pick up or drop off passengers. We moved so slowly it was possible to effectively birdwatch all the way back across the island. The conductor tried to short-change me (which is always possible when you have no clue about the cost of the fare....), but I just left my hand out until he stopped putting money in it. I still don't know the actual fare as the pile of change was too unwieldy to count.

The journey to the Ubung Bus Terminal took four hours. We then caught a pain-free taxi to the Whiterose Hotel in Kuta. The check-in was slow and confusing but the room was fine.

We had lunch before strolling down to Kuta Beach for an obligatory look at the most complete range of human body shapes and colours yet assembled. The beach is long, clean, treed and pleasant.

The narrow streets of Kuta are choked with tourist gift shops and bars. The tourists, mainly Australian and British, were diverse. They included tattooed numbskulls, fit and scarily large young men, and sad pedophile-looking things. Also seen were impossibly fat families from "the continent", aged hippies and gnarly old Aussie men who probably owned most of the local businesses.

Everyone was in a good mood and the vibe was one of hot and humid happiness. But clearly we didn't fit and whilst the prospect of a massage "for ex-pats" was tempting we didn't want this, nor a tattoo, motorbike, coffee (with free massage), T-shirt, pirate DVD collection, taxi, change money (whilst being lightly massaged), head job, Bali safari and massage tour, used boogie board bag with the initials S.C. monogrammed on it, small boys, a fight or a splendid bow and arrow set. The hotel room was much less confusing, cooler and it had a fridge. Actually we did get a few pirate DVDs and pondered one or two of the other things.....

Before dinner we chatted with a well-traveled Aussie guy on his 14th and last month-long surfing trip to Bali. We chewed the fat on near-death big cat experiences, poisonous snakes, surfing opportunities and the quality and quantity of the local skirt. We all agreed that we were between 30 and 50 years too old for what – I can't remember. I seem to have spilled something on my handwritten notes.

Then it was a quick quiet squizz at the Bali Bombing Memorial, a brief fruitless hunt for the Corby Family Surf and Poo Shop and a beer and whisky tour of our hotel room.

Day 6 – 17th June 2009

The Head Cold from Hell and the Status Quo classic had now entered their sixth day with no sign of either of them going anywhere. I figured that these two unwelcome head residents were holding hands somehow. I tried to concentrate on Harry Belafonte because I reckoned the Banana Boat Song could drive anything away. This drove away the Quo but my nose kept running. But the Quo soon returned. Led Zeppelin was now my last chance.....

The Garuda 737-400 flight to Makassar took a little over an hour. We were relieved to be met at the airport by Jefry and Yosua from Adventurindo Tours. There was always a niggling thought that we may have been stranded there – it has happened to me before.

Our new friends were bright and breezy despite the three long days and nights it had taken them to get our car from Manado to Makassar. We were stoked to see we had a fairly new Toyota van with good air-con, plenty of legroom and great windows.

The drive to Rantepao in Torajaland took about nine hours along bendy narrow and pretty bad roads, made worse by the longest roadworks – 150km – I have ever seen. The scenery was good with rice fields, distant limestone mountains, fish farms, traditional Makassar housing and occasional views of the sea. We stopped a couple of times, firstly for lunch which consisted of a bone-filled tasteless charred fishtail, and then for coffee at a roadside stall.

The toilet adjacent to the coffee stall was of note. The bottom of this open plan toilet consisted of split logs butted together. Some might have made the mistake of calling this the toilet floor but they would be wrong – it was the toilet. A careful aim would see minimal splash-back. Any more dramatic use of the toilet would have required special tools, although none could be seen. I suppose you could lay it and then yell at it to go away and then quietly leave.

Our difficult-to-find hotel – the Toraja Prince was quite grand with a steaming swimming pool, landscaped grounds and a hot and cold running woman. Yes, just one. She jogged all over the place and appeared to fill every role – reception, housekeeping, chef, waitress, porter and guide. We kept seeing staff that all looked the same until we realized they were.

Day 7 – 18th June 2009

Status Quo and its friend disappeared from my head and the latter went into Barry-Sean's.

Torajaland presents one of the most amazing cultural experiences you could ever have, particularly if you like looking at the bones of dead people. I have inserted notes here from Wikipedia that relate to their funeral rites only, because otherwise my translation will be utterly lost. The full article, which is well worth a read, can be found here - <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toraja>

Funeral rites

In Toraja society, the funeral ritual is the most elaborate and expensive event. The richer and more powerful the individual, the more expensive is the funeral. In the *aluk* religion, only nobles have the right to have an extensive death feast. The death feast of a nobleman is usually attended by thousands and lasts for several days. A ceremonial site, called *rante*, is usually prepared in a large, grassy field where shelters for audiences, rice barns, and other ceremonial funeral structures are specially made by the deceased's family. Flute music, funeral chants, songs and poems, and crying and wailing are traditional Toraja expressions of grief with exceptions for funerals of young children, and poor, low-status adults.

The ceremony is often held weeks, months, or years after the death so that the deceased's family can raise the significant funds needed to cover funeral expenses. Torajans traditionally believe that death is not a sudden, abrupt event, but a gradual process toward *Puya* (the land of souls, or afterlife). During the waiting period, the body of the deceased is wrapped in several layers of cloth and kept under the *tongkonan*. The soul of the deceased is thought to linger around the village until the funeral ceremony is completed, after which it begins its journey to *Puya*.

Another component of the ritual is the slaughter of water buffalo. The more powerful the person who died, the more buffalo are slaughtered at the death feast. Buffalo carcasses, including their heads, are usually lined up on a field waiting for their owner, who is in the "sleeping stage". Torajans believe that the deceased will need the buffalo to make the journey and that they will be quicker to arrive at *Puya* if they have many buffalo. Slaughtering tens of water buffalo and hundreds of pigs using a machete is the climax of the elaborate death feast, with dancing and music and young boys who catch spurting blood in long bamboo tubes. Some of the slaughtered animals are given by guests as "gifts", which are carefully noted because they will be considered debts of the deceased's family.

There are three methods of burial: the coffin may be laid in a cave or in a carved stone grave, or hung on a cliff. It contains any possessions that the deceased will need in the afterlife. The wealthy are often buried in a stone grave carved out of a rocky cliff. The grave is usually expensive and takes a few months to complete. In some areas, a stone cave may be found that is large enough to accommodate a whole family. A wood-carved effigy, called *tau tau*, is usually placed in the cave looking out over the land. The coffin of a baby or child may be hung from ropes on a cliff face or from a tree. This hanging grave usually lasts for years, until the ropes rot and the coffin falls to the ground.

We visited a number of burial sites. Many of these were in caves or living trees. I was totally and utterly gobsmacked by the tour.

Aside from the culture, history, scenery, architecture and the expert commentary from “Torajan Sami” we also managed quite a few good birds. These started in the leafy grounds of the hotel where birds were very active just on sunrise. Sulawesi hanging-parrot, grey-sided flowerpecker, red honeyeater, short-tailed starling, all the Sulawesi munias, speckled hawk-owl (perched on a cave coffin), yellow-vented whistler, Sulawesi babbler, black-ringed white-eye and black sunbird were all listed.

I reckoned that the day was one of my top ten travel days, should I ever try to list them. A young girl blowing me kisses does not even get a mention....

Beer and whisky time.

Day 8 – 19th June 2009

The pleasing absence of other Australian tourists was starting to become evident. Indeed we did not meet one until we got back to Bali on Day 28.

We drove to Lake Poso, the second largest in Indonesia. This took all day with a short birding stop in mountainous forest above Palopo. This site deserved more time as many good birds could be seen from the road and the traffic was relatively light.

Our first knobbed hornbills were seen. These are surely the most beautiful of all the hornbills and are still common and widespread on Sulawesi.

We paid a visit to the “Black Orchid Forest” on Lake Poso’s western shore but I dare say we will be the last clients Adventurindo takes there. It has fallen in a hole as a place to see.

Our home for two nights was the Siuri Cottages on a sandy beach on the lake’s western edge. A warm beer during a rainstorm preceded a fruitless spotlight along the forested road behind the cottages.

Day 9 – 20th June 2009

The forest along the road behind Siuri Cottages hosted quite a few birds and we soon added rusty-breasted cuckoo, grosbeak starling, Sulawesi hornbill, Sulawesi cicadabird, black-naped fruit-dove, green imperial pigeon and brown cuckoo-dove.

We dropped Jefry to the Tentena bus station so he could go to Palu and plan our assault on Lore Lindu (*which I now refuse to call a national park*). On our return we visited the very good Saluopa Waterfall, which sits deep in a patch of primary forest. Cool water descends rapidly over limestone-formed swimming holes.

An after lunch rest was compromised by a visit from a christian school group. This mixed sex group hailed from all over Indonesia, including a few from “Timor Timor”; presumably this was to distinguish it from East Timor. Naturally the girls wanted their photo taken with me. This was time consuming and tedious but I didn’t want to disappoint them..... I gave a chubby but sparkingly bright girl, Angela, a stuffed toy.

I just had to get away so I sneaked off and trotted down the road. Worse was to come.

“He’s hiding behind that tree”, one 17 year old lass said. “Where; which tree?” “Why is he hiding?” Horror – a whole school group of 17 year old girls and their 25 year old female teacher had ambushed me! A few circled round behind, so I could hide no more. So half an hour of my life was wasted cuddling girls and having my photo taken. One cheeky lass even pinched me on the bottom! The naughty thing. It was enough to keep me lying awake half the night worrying about being dragged out of my room and forced to go swimming in the lake at midnight – and I hadn’t packed my bathers!

Eventually thunderstorms ended proceedings. A young chap gave me a lift back to the accommodation where he spotted the earlier masses of young women. His bike mysteriously broke down. The women ignored him. I came to the conclusion that either I am so incredibly sexy and cannot help but attract attention from women of all ages no matter how smelly and sweaty I am, or, the local girls had never met anyone so old that still had all his teeth.

The rain persisted, as did a constant flow of visitors to our cottage. A gentleman from Flores who made no attempt at conversation with us or anyone else spent hours watching us drink beer and chat to others.

At dinner a couple from Torajaland told us more about their views on life and death (and there really isn’t much difference between the two) and added to our knowledge of the mouse-eating gecko exchange rate. It seems that mice eat rice – no surprises here – and tokay geckos are very good at eating mice. So much so that there is a black market in new and used geckos. At the time of our visit one gecko was worth 1.2 live chickens (size, sex and IQ not stated).

I double-checked that our door was securely unlocked in case we had visitors.

Day 10 – 21st June 2009

I was a bit sad to leave Lake Poso but we had to get to a place called Taboli by 1300 because after that the road was closed due to roadworks.

We had some luck on the way to Poso City with a snoring rail strolling across the road in front of our car. This was quickly followed by a Sulawesi black pigeon feeding on the roadside.

The drive from Poso to the turnoff where the road crosses the island to Palu was uneventful, with clock-watching my favourite activity. We made it in time and just as Yosua said we were some sort of chance of seeing monkeys on the road we spotted a group of Heck’s macaques in a roadside tree and many more on the other side of the road on the ground. These things look more like baboons than macaques and are infinitely more interesting. White-necked mynas sat in the tops of trees and a Sulawesi goshawk obligingly sat in a bush while I took its photograph.

Palu is a shitdump (*if I don’t hyphenate shitdump then I think I can email this to friends in Sutherland Shire Council without the blasphemy police noticing*) of major

proportions. In fact I think it is the most boring and forgettable city I have ever seen, and I find most cities to be boring.

Our staff numbers increased as we caught up with Aprin, a nice young guy on a motorcycle, whose chief function was to be dogs-body and gopher, as well as our new guide whose name I will not state, because I don't want him to miss employment opportunities; he is a very good person, but a hopeless guide for birding, despite previous accolades. He may have lost the plot. For the sake of continuity I shall name him "Extra".

Extra played soccer for Indonesia some time back and was very keen to help us. He talked at a thousand miles per hour in several languages, probably all at once. I am not sure about this. He said he had also studied law. Well I've studied women. That doesn't mean I know anything about the subject.

Our sleeping spot was some sort of trial homestay half an hour south of Palu that made an attempt on the record for having the most uncomfortable sleeping conditions. The homestay was said to be near where maleo might be seen but the estimates for the amount of time needed to walk to the actual site varied wildly. I decided it was best to go elsewhere as early as possible the next morning.

Day 11 – 22nd June 2009

I managed about three hours sleep and Jefry none whatsoever. Sleeping had these impediments – a hard floor, too much light, lightning, rain, insects (noisy and / or biting), the expectation that those who went to town would come back the moment you got to sleep – and they did, and extreme heat and humidity. And noisy owls.

The drive into what was Lore Lindu National Park was slow and depressing. Areas that were forest just six years earlier were now farms and villages. It was two hours into our journey and 81km from Palu before we found any roadside forest. Happily, it was good forest for seeing birds. Although our imbecilic guide forgot his binoculars this hardly mattered and he soon learnt to fall behind us. New birds were cerulean cuckoo-shrike, citrine flycatcher, rusty-bellied fantail, Sulawesi drongo, pygmy woodpecker, piping crow, Sulawesi warbler, streak-fronted dark-eye, Sulawesi crested myna, spotted kestrel, lesser streaked honeyeater, pygmy cuckoo-shrike, malia, blue-fronted blue-flycatcher and crimson-crowned flowerpecker. The only mammal seen was Sulawesi tree squirrel. Of particular interest to us was the Sulawesi endemic "gum tree" *Eucalyptus deglupta*. This tree is a true rainforest monster and has wonderful bark.

We camped at Lake Taming, which sits at an elevation of 1700m. I had a short kip after lunch, before walking to a lookout tower overlooking the lake. Although I tried to lose him, Extra found me. We both made a beeline for the road to the south of the lake. Here Extra learnt two things that he couldn't quite come to terms with. Firstly he was lost. But this wasn't too important because I wasn't lost. The second thing caused Extra much concern. He could not deal with the fact that I didn't believe in his god, or any other for that matter. He said that this day was the most amazing day – he asked me over and over again whether I was serious about being a "non-believer". He later

claimed that I was the one who was lost and that his earlier “disorientation” was caused by a thorn in his head. I think a foot in his head might have helped.

Unguided I wandered off to the lower part of the nearby Anaso Trail with the intention of waiting until it got dark and then spotlighting back to camp. This was the plan anyway. A distant thunderstorm gave me no concern as I pondered the nice things I would spy on my leisurely return stroll. The first few spots of rain landed on my notes so I filed them and waited for the shower to pass.

If I had been a clearer thinker I would have packed a kayak. In this way I could have paddled back to camp, first down the Anaso River Trail rapids and then along the road. In case the camp had missed out on the rain (it had not), I had saved some in my daypack. I made a note not to bring my now useless umbrella home. Spotlighting off, drinking on.

I tried not to take too much interest in the boys enthusiastically rotating a dead and decapitated road-killed rat over a gas flame.

Day 12 – 23rd June 2009

Ashy woodpecker was the first bird of the day as I walked up and down the main road / river. Extra then insisted on coming with me up the Anaso Trail, which may soon be impassable, as a washout has cut a ten metre deep chasm across this old logging road. The two sides of this new valley were linked by a dodgy log-and-earth path that not even a bicycle would have been able to cross. Certainly no vehicles can use it any more. So this “famous” site for high altitude specialties may soon be inaccessible. In the end I gave up looking, just a little way above the “helipad”. The re-growth vegetation was thick and no interesting birds were seen.

Dog was available on the menu for lunch. I asked what it might taste like. “Lamb”, was the reply. “Have you ever eaten lamb?”. “No.” I don’t suppose it mattered as the beast had been drowned in chili and a number of unidentified but no doubt tried and proven spices. After all, we were in the spice islands.

My first piece was entirely bone, which prompted me to think that I had chewed on a dog’s bone. The second bit had a smidgeon of meat. It tasted like spiced lamb. The boys waited for any adverse reactions from me, but aside from a low growl, the occasional bark and an unfortunate episode where I started dry humping Barry-Sean’s leg, I can’t say it was a life-changing experience.

En route to Pokekea, one of the sites where the famous Sulawesi megaliths can be seen, all the village dogs were staring at us.... I was amazed to see the huge rock sculptures and what could surely only be bathing vessels sitting forlornly in grassland in the middle of nowhere. It was a bit of a spin-out trying to figure out what was going on here. Nobody else has worked it out neither. There are 400 of these megaliths in the general area, Jefry told us.

Extra told us that they were 5009 years old. He surprised me with his precise knowledge of history. What are you talking about, Extra? He explained that seeing the megaliths were thought to have been made around 3000BC, then In fact others (who probably have no better idea than Extra) suggest they are more recent, maybe

4441.2 years old. One thing's for sure – they are well made, timeless, well worth seeing and a highlight of my holiday.

It was getting late. Extra pointed in the direction of some good-looking forest and said that we would camp there. I was intrigued when we went to another place entirely. At a locality known as Doda there were farm animals, houses and no forests at all. Extra promised that if we walked along a trail we would find a river and there we could camp. Hmmm. Options were diminishing by the minute as the sun was crashing out of view. All right, we loaded up to see how far the promised “one” or “maybe two” kilometers could be.

As usual I stormed off at low speed looking like I was carrying the earth but having cunningly packed as many bulky lightweight things as I could lay my hands on. My pile still weighed about 30kgs and my thongs were truly tested as they ripped through grass, mud, cowshit and some great snake habitat.

Torches were soon needed as we clambered over monster fig trees that the caring locals had felled across the path. I found what appeared to be a reasonable campsite, given that there were no good ones. Barry-Sean arrived and we began to pitch camp whilst testing the toxicity of the local stinging tree leaves by applying them to our skin.

Our friends arrived in dribs and drabs. It then rained.

Birds seen during the day included Sulawesi hawk-eagle, yellow-and-green lorikeet, golden-mantled racquet-tail and ivory-backed woodswallow.

Day 13 – 24th June 2009

At 0430 I was awake and after a short consideration of my options I decided to go spotlighting. It was remarkably dull and boring until I thought I saw a grey lump disappear from a slender tree trunk. I stood for a while and then a Dian's tarsier started hopping about lemur-like on a small nearby open tree at eye level. I was surprised that there was virtually no eye-shine and that the animal had a very long tail. My first tarsier!

Extra told us of a great trail that followed the river upstream. I soon returned to proffer the view that no such trail existed and the only reality that I found was one of recently built farms. So I wandered off by myself. I soon found a hunting / logging track that ran straight up a range of hills perpendicular to the river. It was quite birdy but also frustrating. I flushed what could only have been a Sulawesi ground-dove from the forest floor but didn't get a good enough view to call it. A Gould's bronze-cuckoo was feeding with some superb fruit-doves and black-naped orioles on some very small fruit. The whole forest floor was raked over by some chook things that were never seen. The highlight was a large troupe of moor macaques. This splendid beast is getting quite rare and I know why - I was able to sneak up very close to them, and if I can do it.... White-bellied imperial pigeons were common and a red-bellied squirrel was seen.

I was back at camp to hear about Barry-Sean's purple-bearded bee-eater success. I was super keen to see these things and raced off in the direction he advised. I missed them but in a patch of trail-side bamboo I noticed a very close but nervous scaly kingfisher staring at me. Apparently these beasties are much harder to find than the bee-eater, which we later saw along the road and elsewhere.

We packed up and trudged back along the slippery trail to our car. Here we chatted to a lovely local family before the three and a half hour drive back to Lake Taming. Extra suggested we continue to Kamarora and camp there. We determined otherwise and it was as well we did as we found out the next day.

Our new campsite was flat and the sun came out briefly. I waited until two minutes before the rain started to go spotlighting. An early night.

Day 14 – 25th June 2009

I went spotlighting to the lake where I determined I would have a nocturnal swim but some locals were camped there so I jumped in a creek. Spotlighting along the road might have been productive but rain intervened. I wandered back to camp and sat in the dark.

We decided to bail, so I walked down the main road toward Palu. The weather was atrocious but there was little rain. I didn't see much of anything and no new birds. The only mammal was a lone male moor macaque raiding a cornfield near the edge of the forest. It won't last. National park indeed.

Apparently much of the park's infrastructure was destroyed during "the disturbance" of 2001, and again more recently. Birding sites that no longer exist except in old trip reports include Dongi Dongi and Kamarora. The Anaso Trail may soon join them when the road washes away above 1850m. Large mammals are still being hunted so they presumably must still be hanging on but we were told not to expect to see any. We saw no sign of them except for an anoa's dung near Doda. Within minutes of this sighting a hunter and his dog appeared.

Despite all this doom and gloom the forest at Lore Lindu still has many good birds and large tracts of fantastic forest and is well worth a visit. A long hike through the forest – and with respect to Adventurindo, they suggested this in our program – might turn up something interesting. One of the biggest problems in the future for birding in Sulawesi will not be the problem of finding good forest – but getting to it. Anything near a road or track is compromised.

After a short stop at Kamarora where we listened to the chainsaw melodies and marvelled at the inner workings of Extra's brain for suggesting we camp there (where? In a rice field?), we bailed to Palu City, where we had lunch and checked into the Sentral Hotel. This is one of only about four hotels in the whole city – the island's second largest, so you can trust me that Palu is not much of a tourist attraction.

The rooms at the Sentral are fine with everything you need. I managed to send some emails from the internet place next door, did some washing and had dinner in the hotel's restaurant.

Day 15 – 26th June 2009

We left Palu at 0600 and arrived at the road that crosses the range to Taboli soon thereafter. We had only just started to ascend when I spotted a large bear cuscus in a leafless tree next to the road. This monster was happily feeding on tiny fruits / leaves and totally unconcerned by our presence. We worried about its future. A hundred metres away a fruiting fig was filled with green pigeons, superb fruit-doves and knobbed hornbills. A Sulawesi black pigeon flew past. Two groups of Heck's macaques were seen further along the road. Forget about so-called national parks – this road was the place. I think it is because the terrain is so steep that removing the trees and hunting in it is quite difficult.

After driving for 12 hours we gave up trying to get as far north as Gorontalo so we stopped at Marisa. To say that the road was atrocious would be too kind to it. Sometimes a 300m stretch of flat tar-seal would end in a hidden void that would be large enough to host small parallel universes. The scenery was nice enough with long stretches of the Tomini Gulf, mangroves, villages (hundreds of them) and rice fields. We managed the occasional bird including the first of our barred rails, along with buff-banded rail and white-rumped cuckoo-shrike.

Our hotel was rather basic. There was one functional tap in the bathroom, which, considering the number of ancient fixtures, was disappointing. The “flush” toilet cistern was the repository of a sludge of ancient cigarette butts, lolly wrappers and dead animal parts. The beds' sheets had hosted many an interesting guest.

Day 16 – 27th June 2009

Twelve hours after leaving Marisa we arrived at Doloduo, a village near Dumoga Bone “national park”. The drive was tiring and was punctuated by a couple of unwelcome toilet stops behind coconut palms. Yosua and Jefry shared the driving and the scenery kept us interested. We stayed at the Tante Min Homestay, which is highly recommended. This large rambling house has hosted many birdwatchers. All the rooms have their own clean bathroom.

Day 17 – 28th June 2009

It was wonderful not to wake up at 0330 as I had done for weeks. I woke at 0300. We were up at 0400 and gone to the Tambun maleo nesting site by 0430. Here we met Max, a ranger, as we entered the forest with torch in hand. We learnt that no maleos had been seen in the previous two days, with a Japanese tour group of eleven birders spectacularly unsuccessful.

We hadn't traveled twenty feet before we heard the sound of maleos crashing blindly through the treetops. All we had to do was wait for the light to improve.

At Tambun the maleos lay their eggs in volcanically heated ground. Creeks within the site are too hot to bathe in and the nesting ground is too hot for large trees to get their roots established.

By first light several maleo could be heard calling in a number of different directions. By 0600 Max had pointed out our first bird and we were to see three to five more. A ranger-guided walk then produced green-backed kingfisher, Stephan's dove, small sparrowhawk – being attacked by a much larger hair-crested drongo – black-billed koel, yellow-billed and bay coucals, Sulawesi crested and white-necked mynas, grosbeak starling and red-backed buttonquail.

In rice fields on the return to the homestay we had two buff-banded rail and two yellow bitterns.

We were informed that squashing a dog with a car could be expensive. A mangy dog was worth 200,000 rupiah (about \$A25) with females being more valuable than males. Squashing them deprived the owners of future calories. I had the thought that the ugliest dogs on the planet partly sustained some of its most beautiful people.

I visited the house next door to the homestay to amuse the children there. The longer I stayed, the more kids there were. Four hours later there were still kids hanging out of trees and peering around corners to see what the white monkeys would do next.

In the mid-afternoon we went to nearby Torout, a lowland birding site. The guide was late in arriving, which was sad because we could have spent a lot more time in this area. The forest remnant next to a reasonably large river was very birdy indeed. Sunda teal were soon followed by both hornbills, green imperial pigeons, pied cuckoo-shrikes, spotted kestrel, blue-backed parrots, ornate lorikeets and various others. A red-backed thrush was spotted by Yosua carelessly trotting around the grounds of the park office.

We could hear the four longnecks that were sitting in the homestay's fridge singing to us long before we arrived during the evening twilight. A wonderful day.

Day 18 – 29th June 2009

At 0440 a blast of islamic noise nonsense capable of being heard three islands away spooked all the local chickens and caused an impromptu neighborhood howling dog concert. Whether the religion of the dogs could be determined by their reaction is moot.

We bid farewell to our homestay hosts and journeyed to Singsingon, also known as Gunung Ambung. The drive wasn't too exciting and we arrived at "Ranger Julius's House" before mid-morning. We then drove a short way to a trail that winds up between two hills through some quite good selectively logged forest in what is supposed to be a nature reserve. The elevation was said to be 1200m but I think it is a little higher than that. Most of the birds we saw at Lake Taming in Lore Lindu were present and the only new birds we spotted were snowy-browed and matinan flycatchers. A troupe of macaques were seen fleetingly and were not positively identified.

There is no forest within walking distance of our homestay so I spent the better part of the afternoon trying to imagine what life would be like in such a place. At one point I gave up on this and headed for the hills. I didn't see any birds but saw some great

vegetables including shallot, potato – including the locally restricted “sweet” variety, corn, string bean, pumpkin and cow. Cows are not really vegetables but this one was so tangled in its tether it was incapable of any movement so it may have, given enough time, turned into a vegetable.

Meanwhile Singsongon village was taking a shot as the noisiest village in Indonesia. Next to our house a rather dull-looking kid was detuning his motorcycle after having removed its muffler. Some sage had told all the kids that the noisier the bike, the more powerful it would be and the more women you could carry, and so on. The idea spread around.

In the late afternoon we went back to the same forest we visited in the morning to spotlight for owls. Cinnabar boobooks were calling all around but we failed to see any. But all was not lost as we did get good views of speckled boobook and Sulawesi masked owl.

Day 19 – 30th June 2009

We had a slow start, driving to Tomohon in the Minahasa Highlands. We stopped along the way to buy some lovely freshly roasted peanuts and to view a sulfurous crater lake, which had dozens of Sunda teal swimming on it.

Our accommodation was Onong’s Palace Resort. So there you go – a palace and a resort. We were not received by local royalty but rather by a local youth. The location was good and the facilities were fancy but the nearby forest was trashed. Luckily it started to rain so I didn’t have to waste too much time looking in it.

Really this was a wasted day. You can easily drive from Singsongon to Tangkoko in a day thus allowing an extra day in the field. Maybe the fact that our guides lived in Tomohon played a small part in the development of the itinerary.....

Day 20 – 1st July 2009

We visited a traditional Minahasa Display Village. The houses are 100% timber and are fully pulled apart and re-erected on your vacant lot. Why do they do this?

Next stop was a fogged in volcanic cone. But all was not lost as the road leading to it was awash with barred rails and Isabelline bush-hens. Sometimes up to ten birds could be seen at one time!

We then went to the much-anticipated Tangkoko forest (by this time I had given up on terms like nature reserve etc). We stayed at Tangkoko Lodge. We were the lodge’s first guests as it had opened this very day. The owner, Bobby, was said to be our guide but this didn’t happen for one reason or another. Never mind, the lodge has a boundary with the forest so many good birds could be seen. A ruddy kingfisher perched in front of our room. We couldn’t enter the park for reasons that were not obvious but something to do with money and rules, so we drove back up the road to a site that Bobby said was quite good for roadside birds, but we found it more productive for roadside rain. After we stewed in the car for half an hour we staged a strategic retreat, to our beer.

Day 21 – 2nd July 2009

We entered the park with Dinan, Bobby's uncle. Bobby had suddenly realized he needed to be elsewhere. Dinan is a great bloke and very obliging. First stop was the "campground" although it was clear that nobody really camps there anymore. The idea was to watch for pigeons and parrots flying about.

A raucous call announced a pair of yellow-crested cockatoos cavorting in the top of a tall tree. I do not know how they got there – maybe out of a cage – but they are on my list as this is their ancestral home. Birding was otherwise slow. We had good views of lilac-cheeked kingfisher, I flushed a barred buttonquail, a pair of Philippine scrubfowl bolted, and a pair of Sulawesi scops-owls were photographed. Mammals seen were Sulawesi tarsier, Celebes black macaque, and pale and Sulawesi tree-squirrels.

We scanned the forest floor for hours looking for blue-breasted pitta but failed to see one. Interestingly, elegant pitta was seen the previous week. We melted back to the lodge for lunch. We had a cold one and did some washing. Seconds later it started to rain. I made a note to look up the definition of "dry" when I got home.

After lunch Dinan and I went tramping about looking for racquet-tails but failed. A large male Celebes crested macaque and I crossed paths. It tried to push me out of the way. This is not a great survival skill on the part of the monkey but it was a pretty funny thing to happen. The only notable birds were a pair of Sulawesi nightjars.

We returned to the site of the previous day's washout but this time we got blown away. Tree branches were crashing down. The best things seen appeared after we returned to the lodge and found a bottle opener.

Day 22 – 3rd July 2009

With a little less anticipation we entered the same forest as we did yesterday. A bear cuscus was seen where we parked the car. A blue-breasted pitta was seen minutes later but then it was very quiet. Dinan was focused on the next bird on our list – Sulawesi pygmy kingfisher – rather than trying to maximize our tally of unseen birds. We missed the kingfisher.

In the afternoon we had a boat trip to search for great-billed kingfisher. The jolly boatman and his double-outriggered craft set forth into some of the best scenery tropical seas have to offer. The crystal clear water was complemented by offshore islets, a rocky shoreline with beaches here and there, hidden coves and caves and a dirty big thunderstorm which landed on our heads. The sea was dotted with floating fishing platforms, traps and other bits and pieces. The beaches alternated between having sand that was as black as a billygoat's bum to pure white reduced coral.

The dry season fell on us just as we entered a shallow mangrove-lined creek. I took shelter in a nearby fisherperson's hut much to the amusement of its occupying fisherpersons. Remarkably their largely bamboo home did not leak. I ran my eyes over the walls and ceiling noting their very simple possessions, most of which related

to making fish unhappy. Our boatman, meanwhile, was getting drowned and giggling like a mad thing. My other friends were buried under a morass of plastic sheeting.

The storm must have found some other tourists to impress and buggered off. We went up the creek with a paddle. The mangroves had many orchids growing on them and represented kingfisher heaven. Aside from good views of great-billed there were also sacred, common, collared and ruddy. Other birds included Stephan's dove, dollarbird, white-rumped cuckoo-shrike, pink-necked green-pigeon, great-billed and striated herons and silver-tipped imperial pigeons.

This boat trip is not to be missed if visiting Tangkoko.

A spotlighting walk into the forest after dinner was unsuccessful.

Day 23 - 4th July 2009

We had breakfast and then drove to a wildlife rehab center near Bitung. It was quite depressing and we learnt many things that I wished I didn't know about. Apparently the centre used to have external funding but local officials pocketed the money so twelve of the fourteen staff stopped coming to "work". This happens if you get no pay.

We were told that most of Indonesia's smuggled wildlife goes first by boat to the Philippines where wildlife protection laws are even worse; which doesn't seem possible. A British national heading up a rescue team for the center told me that hunting in Sulawesi is still on the increase and the way things are going there would soon be virtually no large mammals left in the wild.

The only good thing was to get a close look at, and be licked by, some babirusa. The enclosure they have is so big they can largely look after themselves as far as food goes. As I will never see a wild one it was nice to at least see this remarkable animal.

We continued to Manado, were bemused by the world's second largest Jesus-on-a-stick, had lunch in a big modern shopping mall, bought some groceries (beer and nuts) and checked into the lovely Manado Quality Hotel (thanks Jefry!).

Dinner was in a small but popular restaurant overlooking a beautiful Manado Bay sunset. I had Barry-Sean with me.....

Day 24 – 5th July 2009

At 0700 a Dash 8-300 aircraft operated by Wings Airlines took us the island of Ternate. The plane was a real pile of junk with big gaps between outside metal things that I think are meant to be very close together. At Ternate Airport we were greeted by a smiling Mr Nurlin Djuni, a slight but energetic chap who guides birdwatchers and divers.

Ternate was hot, beer-free and boring - aside from the big volcano in the middle of the island, which, come to think of it, is the island. Happily we were soon on our way to the much larger island of Halmahera, a short speedboat ride away.

The boat had three 40hp outboards and the floating-rubbish-dodging trip to the port town of Sidangoli was very enjoyable. The only wildlife seen was a single bridled tern and a lone Pacific reef-egret.

Just 10km out of town we started walking along the road searching for birds. Not a single bird was heard or seen. We then walked up a short and muddy trail that became a little less muddy after Nurlin fell into it. Nurlin was very patient as we stayed bogged in one spot for what I thought was too generous an amount of time. But his persistence rewarded us with paradise-crow, ivory-breasted pitta (good in-flight views), dusky friarbird, Moluccan flycatcher and cream-throated white-eye.

We then went to Anu's place. The KBP road was impassable to our car well before Anu's trail turns off it so we had to carry all our stuff. Hot and thirsty work indeed.

Anu's place, a collection of bits and pieces built from local materials and offering none of the comforts of home has two key advantages. Firstly it is perfectly located on a ridge where many great birds can be seen without having to walk anywhere, and secondly, a short distance downhill there is a freshwater river with big cool holes in it. The second of these advantages can only be fully realized if you choose not to walk back up the hill. Otherwise you need to go back down to cool off, ad infinitum.

A big fruiting fig tree complemented the views of two valleys and added a host of birds to our "staying still drinking whisky" list. These were rufous-bellied triller, Moluccan hanging-parrot, grey-headed fruit-dove, blue-and-white kingfisher (a much more stunning bird than its name suggests) and white cockatoo.

We shared our drinks with a colony of the endemic and rarely described Halmahera alcohol ant. They adored gin and lime, swimming robustly from one side of the glass to the other; however single malt killed them stone dead. This was good news for me – I'll never have an infestation of Halmahera alcohol ants in my stomach.

A short spotlighting walk along the KBP road revealed Moluccan scops-owl, Moluccan boobook, common paradise kingfisher and masked flying-fox, which is a very pretty mammal indeed.

Day 25 – 6th July 2009

We were up long before we had effectively gone to bed. This was to ensure we could be on the mud by 0400 to get to the Wallace's standardwing lek by the time we were told we had to get there. Once there we could marvel at how much extra sleep we could have had. Inevitably the sun rose, although we had learnt through bitter personal experience that in the Indonesian dry season there was no guarantee we would see such a thing.

Well before we could see anything at all, including each other, five or so male WSBOPs were screaming at each other just metres away. I wondered just how much light I needed to be able to claim the bird based on call + outline of bird. We needn't have worried.

We spent an hour watching these almost idiotic birds perform their display flights, twist themselves into uncomfortable looking positions and make a series of noises that would be impossible to describe unless you have experience writing bird guide books. A couple of female birds did what they do best when faced with a scrum of handsome randy males - they ignored them.

Eventually we reckoned there was not much more to be gained from the experience so we walked / slid / fell back along the path, this time in daylight. Birds seen included golden bulbul, dusky megapode, blue-capped fruit-dove and violet-necked lorikeet.

We left Anu, much to his disappointment. This was related to the silly and movable cost of staying in his hovel rather than any real desire to move on our part. We drove toward Tobelo. Our reason for going there was a little mysterious. There weren't many key birds to be gained and the drive took four hours. Never mind, we got to see another part of the island and its people and Nurlin tried his best to find some birds that clearly had gone elsewhere. En route we managed sombre kingfisher and a Pacific baza resting on the power-lines.

We had a quick rest at a good but window-challenged hotel before driving to a site north of town that looked very much like a road. Much birdwatching in Sulawesi and Halmahera is undertaken by walking along roads. Whilst this can often be rewarding it is more than a little dangerous and lacks a certain amenity. Our target birds were not seen but we did manage some prehistoric-looking goliath coucals, long-billed crow, Oriental hobby, white-bellied cuckoo-shrike and a girl swimming with her headscarf intact. This drove us to drink.

Our hotel manager had cheerfully procured us some beer and placed it in his fridge. This was the perfect complement to all the "hullo misters", laughs and giggles we had elicited from roadside lovelies. I had been recording data for some time on the percentage of positive responses from roadside folk. Over 90% responded enthusiastically. The others were probably deaf or blind. There was no gender bias in the responses although the sample size varied with a sample of 12,803 females and just 11 males.

Dinner, regrettably, was at a dodgy place near the hotel. A bucket of cold beer failed to kill whatever was living in the aged grilled chicken. At 0200 I was trying to focus on the thought that childbirth couldn't possibly hurt more than the pain I was feeling. I had the telephone shower dumping cold water all over various body parts whilst trying not to turn the bathroom into something for which it wasn't designed. Parts of my person went numb and at one point I fell off the porcelain and onto the floor. I suspected something might be wrong with me.

The rest of **Day 26 – 7th July 2009**

I was up at 0500 and enthusiastic about being alive.

We traveled from Tobelo to Sidangoli with many birding stops along the way. It was a little frustrating with targeted birds refusing to be seen while many birds that can be seen fairly easily in Australia falling over each other and posing in full view.

We walked along the KBP road in the afternoon but a convoy of trucks came and went and certainly didn't add to the enjoyment of the site, or what's left of it given the incursions of local farmers and crop growers.

Our new home was the only hotel in Sidangoli with air-conditioning and it was very welcome. The air-con would have been welcome a whole lot earlier if there was any electricity to power it, but there you have it – Sidangoli gets the power at night and Tobelo during the day. So you have the choice of a cold beer or a good night's sleep but not both. Difficult.

Day 27 – 8th July 2009

This was our last day in the field and I needed three new birds to get to a birding milestone that some hold to be very important. I'm quite sure that it is totally unimportant so it is not detailed here.

The best roadside forest we could find on Halmahera sits exactly at the point of the KM12 marker on the road from Sidangoli. Our arrival coincided with sunrise. I figured that sitting on the road scanning treetops and fly-pasts would be a good strategy. Nurlin soon found us a cinnamon-bellied imperial pigeon, a really lovely bird. There was a short lull in activity before the valley filled with light and in the space of three minutes we had bagged Halmahera cuckoo-shrike, dusky-brown oriole and a fleeting view of a chattering chattering lorry.

Some roadside wandering followed but the day was getting hot and we were losing interest, so we bailed.

Whilst the boat trip from Ternate to Halmahera was a pleasant and relaxing experience the same cannot be said about the return journey. The water was very choppy and our fairly small, home-built and poorly maintained fiberglass missile bashed its way through the water rather than riding over the top of it. Bone-jarring descents into holes in the waves raised the possibility of dying at sea. I scanned the scant contents of the boat, failing to notice anything that might float aside from the fuel containers. I couldn't remember what they said at the safety drill.....

Our hotel on Ternate – The Boulevard – is directly opposite the Halmahera ferry “wharf”. The hotel was quite nice in a windowless room sort of way.

The Fat Lady was screaming her head off as we departed for our last excursion – a trip to a volcanic crater lake to search for great-billed parrot. The hotel driver took us there. This is significant. Ternate is an island that is not very big. I am told that you can drive around its road in 45 minutes and the road is crap. So not very big at all. Now our driver, a guy maybe in his twenties who had lived all his life on the island HAD NEVER BEEN to one of its major attractions and wasn't sure where it was!

The crater lake is really quite beautiful. It has a colony of grebes living on it and has little interference from people aside from being slowly filled by rock-throwing local youth. Thick forest grows on its sides. It was from a section of this forest that we failed to see the three great-billed parrots flying. Oh well. A number of white cockatoos were spotted but that was about it. Thinking about it I seem to remember a

few young girls wishing to have their photos taken with a sex god. But they couldn't find one so.....

The drive back to The Boulevard was via the Smuggler's Quarter. Here we managed to procure illicit drugs – two bottles of beer. I am uncertain of whether beer is actually illegal on Ternate but the whole acquisition exercise looked very dodgy. Never mind – we quickly destroyed the evidence.

The Highland Park lasted until the last day, as did the home-bought bog-roll, the cake of soap and my bottle of shampoo. Oddly I saw exactly the number of birds I thought would be a good total. To add weight to the idea that it was time to go home I found that I had inherited an interesting and painful infection on my left ankle.

Day 28 – 9th July 2009

Our Wings flight from Ternate to Manado was scheduled for a 0915 departure. This didn't happen, which was almost predicted by Jefry who said he never books on the last possible flight from Ternate because the flights are very unreliable.

I now have an excellent working knowledge of the Ternate Airport car park because we spent about seven hours sitting in it. The terminal, such as it is, lacks much in the way of ventilation so the car park soon filled with bored but friendly locals who didn't appear too upset about their change of travel plans.

There are a number of flights from Ternate to Manado each day. We were assured that we would have priority on the second flight at 1300. This assurance wasn't worth much as the actual plane used is the same one as the earlier flight as it flies back and forth, or not. Jefry rang Manado and found out that the plane was having a very stress-free time parked on the airport's apron. Then we were told the plane was busted and that plane bits were being sought in Jakarta.

It was around this time that I accidentally got engaged to be married. A delightful islamic lass sidled up to me in my prime car park gutter position and started a conversation. She explained that she was learning to be an English teacher and lived on the nearby island of Tidoli. Her sister and brother were with her. The brother eyed me suspiciously. Why? When we parted I shook her hand, which surely made her pregnant. Worse was to come.

Jefry convinced the fine folk from rival air carrier, Merpati, that us white boys needed to go to Manado post haste or else we would miss an international flight and then Australia would declare war on the island of Ternate; a fight that Australia just might be capable of winning, for a while. This argument was so convincing that Jefry, Barry-Sean, my fiancé and I found ourselves on a CASA 212-200 ex Spanish military flying museum. Nurlin was left to ponder Ternate a little longer. Our unpressurised relic made lots of fascinating but very un-plane-like noises as it was wrenched about in preparation for take-off. The pilot was in clear view from where I was sitting and was totally unfazed by any of this. My clear view was soon obstructed when he caught me inspecting his instruments....

Our ponderous and amazingly noisy beast arrived at Manado where we had a lovely view of our stranded Wings aircraft. We departed the terminal where my lady was looking confused in the car park. She gave me a sweet smile that I think was intended to get us to offer her a lift into town but I gave her a quick kiss on the back of her hand, thus completing all the wedding formalities, ensuring her child did not grow up as a bastard and doing much for islamic – atheist relations. I gave no forwarding address and so far I haven't had any unusual visitors at home.

Jeffrey took us back to the wonderful Manado Quality Hotel. I went straight to the nearby "apotek" to get something for my infected ankle. The University of Sydney trained chemist (and various bystanders) had a quick look, gave me some antibiotics and relieved me of \$A2. No doctors, no waiting around and no practiced black-art flourish from an Australian chemist who suggests you come back in 20 minutes because they had never had such a difficult prescription and which required a team of silent scientists to ferret furiously away in lab coats in a back room.

Day 29 – 10th July 2009

A lavish hotel breakfast preceded our travel marathon.

Jeffrey took us to the airport via a tourist gift shop. We soon said our goodbyes to a true gentleman.

We caused no end of stress to the check-in lass by asking that our luggage be checked to Sydney. This took forever. I don't think she had done this before. We were the first in our check-in queue and by the time we had finished the whole check-in area was deserted.

The flight to Makassar was short and sweet. The one and a bit hour journey took approximately six days less than driving the route. We had a short wait for our flight to Denpasar, arriving in Bali just on sunset.

The grounds around Denpasar Airport have many food and gift shops. We had five and a half hours to wait for our flight to Sydney. This time was spent pleasantly enough chatting to ultra-friendly Balinese shopkeepers, taxi drivers, passers-by and the guy whose job it was to get an Australian idiot out of Bali. This nutter was a middle aged female wreck who claimed to hail from Merimbula on the NSW South Coast. She quickly fell in love with Barry-Sean. I don't think the attraction was physical. It related more to what Barry-Sean was holding – a can of beer. I was to learn that this alcoholic mess was turned way from the previous night's flight to Sydney because she was too pissed to stand up. While the friendly and obliging Barry-Sean was innocently doing his best to make things worse (by trying to buy her a beer), her Balinese "minder" had called the Australian consul, who arrived and eventually struck some sort of deal because we spotted this nitwit on our plane.

The Balinese are a true delight. If it wasn't for the relentless heat, the number of western tourists and the lack of variety in their beer, I could almost think of.....

Well done Indonesia. Whatever opinions I might have had before my visit have well and truly changed for the better. Despite my wry writing style, it was a truly

wonderful experience. Just two things to ponder – stop killing everything, and, for half the population - wear a condom.

Steve Anyon-Smith

28th July 2009

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This may be my last trip report for a while....

Bird List

Notes:

Bali - the plate number in Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali

Wall – the plate number in Birds of Wallacea

BB – Bali Barat National Park

TT – Torajaland

LP – Lake Poso

LL – Lore Lindu

DB – Dumago Bone (incl. Tambun, Torout, Singsingon)

Ma – Minahasa Highlands

Ta – Tangkoko

T – Ternate

H - Halmahera

The numbers in the columns represent the first “Day Number” – see diary, that each bird was seen at each site. Birds heard only are not listed. Birds in red indicate “lifera”.

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
12	12	Spotted Kestrel				11	17				26
12	12	Oriental Hobby									25
12	12	Peregrine Falcon						20			
	12	Pacific Baza									25
9	9	Black-winged Kite		6							
9	9	Black Kite		6			18				
9	9	Brahminy Kite		7	8	13	17	19	22	27	24
9	9	White-bellied Sea Eagle					16		21		
	10	Sulawesi Serpent Eagle		6	9	12					

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
	9	Spotted Harrier					16				
	11	Sulawesi Goshawk				10			23		
	11	Spot-tailed Goshawk							21		
	11	Variable Goshawk/Grey Goshawk									26
	11	Dwarf (Small) Sparrowhawk					17				
11	10	Indian Black Eagle	2	7		10	17				
	10	Gurney's Eagle									24
	10	Sulawesi Hawk-Eagle				12			22		
	17	Barred Rail				14	17	19	21		
	17	Buff-banded Rail					17				
	16	Snoring Rail			10						
	17	Isabelline Bush-hen						20			
18	17	White-breasted Waterhen		8				19	22		
19	17	Purple Swamphen						19			
	15	Red-backed Buttonquail					17				
15	15	Barred Buttonquail	4	6					21		
26	20	Beach Stone Curlew	2								
26	20	Black-winged Stilt		6			16				
22	20	Whimbrel	2								
30	5	Greater Crested Tern	2								
29	4	Black-naped Tern	2								
29	5	Bridled Tern								24	
33	21	Rock Dove	1	6				19	20		
		Red Collared Dove				10					
34		Island Collared Dove	2								
34	21	Spotted-necked Dove	1	7		12	17				25
	22	Brown Cuckoo-Dove		6	9	11	17	19	20	27	26
34		Ruddy Cuckoo-Dove #1	4								
	21	Black Cuckoo-Dove (Sul bl pig)			10	15	17				

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
34	23	Emerald Dove	2			15					
	23	Stephan's Dove					17		22		
34	21	Zebra Dove	2								
32	27	Pink-necked Green Pigeon	2						22		
31	27	Grey-cheeked Green Pigeon	2	7		15					
	25	Superb Fruit Dove				13	18				
	26	Blue-capped Fruit Dove									25
	26	Grey-headed Fruit Dove									24
32	25	Black-naped Fruit Dove	3		9	10	17		21		
	24	White-bellied Imperial Pigeon				13	18				
33	23	Green Imperial Pigeon	2		9		17		21		
	24	Cinnamon-bellied Imperial Pigeon									27
33	24	Pied Imperial Pigeon									25
	24	Silver-tipped Imperial Pigeon							20		
	30	Sulawesi Hanging Parrot		7	9	11	17	20	22		
	30	Moluccan Hanging Parrot									24
35	29	Yellow-crested Cockatoo							21		
	29	White Cockatoo								27	24
	28	Violet-necked Lory									25
	28	Ornate Lorikeet					17		21		
	28	Yellow-and-green Lorikeet				12					
	28	Chattering Lory									27
	28	Red-flanked Lorikeet									26
	30	Red-cheeked Parrot									24
	29	Golden-mantled Racquet-tail				12			21		
	29	Blue-backed Parrot					17		21		
	30	Eclectus Parrot									24
37	31	Brush Cuckoo									26
	31	Chestnut (rusty)-breasted Cuckoo			9	11	17				

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
	31	Gould's Bronze Cuckoo				13					
	32	Black-billed Koel					17		21		
	32	Channel-billed Cuckoo							21	27	
38		Chestnut-bellied Malkoha	3								
	32	Yellow-billed Malkoha		8		11	17		21		
	32	Bay Coucal					17		21		
	32	Goliath Coucal									25
38		Greater Coucal	1								
38	32	Lesser Coucal	3		10				21		25
	33	Sulawesi Masked Owl					18				
	34	Moluccan Scops Owl									24
	34	Sulawesi Scops Owl							20		
	33	Moluccan Hawk-Owl (boobook)									24
	33	Speckled Hawk-Owl (boobook)		7			18				
	34	Great Eared Nightjar			8		17				
	34	Sulawesi Nightjar							21		
41	34	Savanna Nightjar	2			10					
42	35	Glossy Swiftlet	2	7		11		20	21	27	24
	35	Moluccan Swiftlet				10		19		27	
	35	Uniform Swiftlet			8			19	21		
	35	Purple Needletail				11					
42	35	Asian Palm Swift		6							
42	35	Fork-tailed or Pacific Swift	2								
42		House Swift	1								
42	35	Grey-rumped Treeswift	2	6	9	10	17	19	22		
	39	Purple-winged or Sulawesi Roller				16		19	21		
46	39	Dollarbird	2						22		27
	39	Green-backed Kingfisher					17		22		
	36	Scaly Kingfisher				13					

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
	36	Common Paradise Kingfisher									24
	37	Lilac-cheeked Kingfisher							21		
	36	Black (great) -billed Kingfisher							22		
	36	Ruddy Kingfisher							20		
45		Javan Kingfisher	2								
	37	Blue-and-white Kingfisher									24
	37	Sombre Kingfisher									25
45	37	Collared Kingfisher	2	6	8	10	17	19	21		25
45	37	Sacred Kingfisher	2	6	9						25
44		Cerulean (small blue) Kingfisher	2								
44	37	Common Kingfisher		7	9				21		
	39	Purple-bearded Bee-eater				13					
46	39	Blue-tailed Bee-eater		6		10					
46	39	Rainbow Bee-eater							21	27	24
46		Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	2								
47		Oriental Pied Hornbill	2								
	38	Sulawesi Hornbill			9		17				
	38	Knobbed Hornbill			8	10			21		
	38	Plain-pouched (Blyth's) Hornbill									24
48		Lineated Barbet	2								
49		Blue-eared Barbet	3								
49		Coppersmith Barbet	2								
	40	Sulawesi Pygmy Woodpecker				11		19			
50		Brown-capped Woodpecker	3								
50		Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	3								
51		Greater Flame-backed Woodpecker	2								
	40	Ashy Woodpecker				12	17		21		
	40	Red-bellied (blue-breasted) Pitta							22		

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
62	46	Black-naped Oriole	3	8	9	13	17		21		
61		Black Drongo	2								
61		Ashy Drongo	4								
61	45	Hair-crested Drongo		8	8		17		20		
	45	Sulawesi Drongo				11					
	45	Spangled Drongo									24
61		Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	3								
79		Pied Fantail	2								
		Willie-wagtail									25
	56	Rusty-bellied Fantail				11	18				
79	55	Black-naped Monarch	3	6	9	11		19	21		
	55	Broad-billed Flycatcher									24
	55	Spectacled Monarch									25
	55	Moluccan (slaty) Flycatcher									24
	55	Shining Flycatcher									26
63		Racquet-tailed Treepie	2								
63	47	Slender-billed Crow		7	9	13	17	19	20		
	47	Piping Crow				11					
	47	Long-billed Crow									25
63		Large-billed Crow/Jungle Crow	2								
	47	Torresian Crow								27	
	47	Paradise-crow									24
	47	Standardwing									25
64		Great Tit	2								
54	41	Barn Swallow	3								
54	41	Pacific Swallow	3	6	8	10	17	19	21	27	24
74	50	Zitting Cisticola				12					
75		Bar-winged Prinia	2								
75	51	Mountain Tailorbird				11	18				

Bali	Wall	Bird	BB	TT	LP	LL	DB	Ma	Ta	T	H
	15	Maleo					17				
	15	Philippine Megapode							21		
	15	Dusky Megapode									25
17		Green Junglefowl	2								
		Green Peafowl #1	4								
8	13	Wandering Whistling Duck			9						
8	13	Sunda Teal					17	19			
26	6	Little Grebe								27	
7		Lesser Adjutant	2								
6	8	Yellow Bittern					17				
6	8	Striated Heron	2						22		
6	8	Javan Pond Heron	5	6	9	10	17				
5	8	Cattle Egret	1	6	9	13	17	19			
5	7	Great-billed Heron	2		9				22		
5	7	Purple Heron	1	7		11	17				
5	7	Great Egret	2	6							
5	7	Intermediate Egret		6							
5	7	Little Egret	5	6	9	12	17	19			
5	7	Pacific Reef Egret									24
2	1	Brown Booby	3								
12		Black-thighed Falconet	4								
75		Ashy Tailorbird	2								
58		Black-headed Bulbul	3								
58	45	Sooty-headed Bulbul	1	6	9	10	17	19	21		
59	45	Yellow-vented Bulbul	1	6							
90		Grey-cheeked Bulbul	2								
	45	Golden Bulbul									25
74		Striated Grassbird	2								
	50	Chestnut-backed Bush Warbler				11		19			
	51	Sulawesi Leaf Warbler				11	18				
	48	Sulawesi Babbler		7			17	19	21		
	45	Malia				11	18				
86	52	Mountain White-eye		7		11	18				
86	52	Lemon-bellied White-eye	2			10					
	52	Lemon-thr (bl-ringed) White-eye		7							
	52	Cream-throated White-eye									24
	52	Black-fronted White-eye		7		11	18	19			
	52	Streak-headed White-eye				11					
	59	Shining (metallic) Starling									24
82	59	Asian Glossy Starling				14			22		
82	59	Short-tailed Starling		7							
	59	Sulawesi Myna				11	17				
	58	White-necked Myna				10	17		21		
	58	Fiery-browed Myna		8		12	18				
	58	Finch-billed Myna (grosbeak st)			9	11	17		21		
82	59	Pale-bellied Myna	1	7							
82		Black-winged Myna	3								
82		Bali Myna	2								
	49	Red-backed Thrush					17		23		
71	48	Pied Bushchat		6	10	10					

Mammal List

Mammal		BB	B	LL	PT	Ta	H
Rusa Deer	<i>Cervus timorensis</i>	■					
Barking Deer	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>	■					
Javan Mongoose	<i>Herpestes javanicus</i>		■				
Long-Tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>	■					
Ebony Leaf Monkey*	<i>Trachypithecus auratus</i>	■	■				
Celebes Crested Macaque	<i>Macaca nigra</i>					■	
Moor Macaque	<i>Macaca maura</i>			■			
Heck's Macaque	<i>Macaca hecki</i>				■		
Dian's Tarsier	<i>Tarsius diana</i>			■			
Sulawesi Tarsier	<i>Tarsius spectrum</i>					■	
Sunda Porcupine	<i>Hystrix javanica</i>	■					
Black Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa bicolor</i>	■					
Pale Tree Squirrel	<i>Prosciurillus leucomus</i>					■	
Sulawesi Tree Squirrel	<i>Prosciurillus murinus</i>			■		■	
"Bali" Squirrel#		■					
Red-bellied Squirrel	<i>Rubisciurus rubriventer</i>			■			
Black Rat	<i>Rattus rattus</i>	■					
Masked Flying Fox	<i>Pteropus personatus</i>						■
Wild Boar	<i>Sus scrofa</i>	■					
Bear Cuscus	<i>Ailurops ursinus</i>				■	■	

BB - Bali Barat NP (Bali)

B - Baluran NP (Java)

LL - Lore Lindu (Sulawesi)

PT - Palu to Taboli Rd (S)

Ta - Tangkoko (S)

H - Halmahera

Red indicates "lifers"

*Our guide in Bali insisted that the leaf monkey seen in Bali Barat is silvered leaf monkey and not ebony leaf monkey. I didn't get good enough views.

#There is a very common and very plain squirrel on Bali that our guide called "coconut ground squirrel". I have no idea what it is.