

SABAH 2017- A new report.

In January 2016 I bought the new edition of the Malaysia LONELY PLANET guide. I had decided to return in Sabah where I had been 20 years ago. My aim: seeing a Clouded Leopard. I knew that there are relatively regularly seen at Danum Valley, Tabin and Deremakot. Both Danum Valley and Tabin are very expensive. You have not the right to drive in Danum Valley and their tours are short. With the daily rate a week stay would have been ridiculously expensive. When I visited Danum during my first trip in Sabah I got on a night tour a Bearded Pig, a Slow Loris and a Buffy Fish Owl! And I don't think they appreciate a guy like me who behave more as a backpacker. You are I think allowed to drive in Tabin where leopard are even seen in the Oil Palm Plantations. Concerning Deremakot I had few informations how to organise a visit. I had seen the trip report of Jon Hall when he visited this place with Mike Gordon of Adventure Alternative Borneo. Many people say that Mike has extraordinary eyes and I contacted him. But he answered me "it is too expensive I will contact you when I have somebody else". I never received any offer. Then arrived the very good trip report of Richard Web and I decided to try my chance independently. I asked on Mammalwatching if somebody was interested to join me but nobody contacted me. Doing this trip alone is challenging. It is very difficult if not impossible to drive and spotlight alone. But I had to try. I organised my stay at Deremakot with Musrin Kasan who was very helpful. Choosing a date was difficult to avoid to be there with another group and there was already a lot o bookings. April is said to be relatively dry and there was a week with not everyday a booking. I choose to stay there from April 5th to 12th. I won't give you all the practical informations concerning this place, again I recommend you have a look at Richard Web's report.

I arrived in Kota Kinabalu on the 31st of March. The following day I went for 2 days and 2 nights at Kinabalu National Park, then I spent 2 nights near the Rain Forest Discovery Center near Sepilok, then 1 week at Deremakot and 2 days and nights along the Kinabatangan River at Sukau Greenview lodge. This place has not the favour of most mammalwatchers who prefer to stay at Kinabatangan Jungle Camp which is far more expensive. I was specially interested to look for Flat Headed Cat and both places have a place for this species. I first contacted KJC but they were not really interested to give me informations. I never received any response from Robert Chong. And by the end his staff never responded to my last emails. Sukau Greenview is in a less interesting place, without any trail where you can walk independently, the state of the forest along the river is depressing but the Menangol river (tributary of the Kinabatangan) is a good place for the cat. The manager, Emelyn, responded me each time I asked her informations. Unfortunately they are many lodges in this area and several boats are on this river by night. Nevertheless the Balmford family (see Mammalwatching) saw 2 cats there. All the local guides have seen this species along this river (but very rarely) and also along the Kinabatangan. After this place I flew back home.

KINABALU NATIONAL PARK

During my 2 days there (unfortunately during a week end with a lot of local tourists with their own cars and a lot of minivans of the park) I walked by day along the road to Tympoon gate and the Silau and Kiau Trails. I saw a lot of Borneo Ground Squirrels near Tympoon gate (they are next to the platform where tourists feed Black-banded Squirrels, also very common there). They eat the food

dropping on the ground from the platform . Several of them visit the rubbish bins as Hylomys (I saw several of the latter). Mountain Treeshrews also feed at both places.

I day I stayed until night at the rubbish bins hoping for a Bornean Ferret Badger but without luck (but the place was regularly disturbed, even by night). On my ways back I saw a Masked Palm Civet in a tree. The second night I got 2 Horsfield's Flying Squirrels near the headquarters and by the end of the night 1 Jentick Flying Squirrel.

Along the Kiau trail next to the headquarters I saw 1 Kinabalu Squirrels, many Jentick Squirrels, 1 Borneo Ground Squirrel, 2 Sunda Giant Squirrels and 2 Smooth Tailed Treeshrews.

SEPILOK RAIN FOREST DISCOVERY CENTER

I did a private night tour there. Unfortunately Alex recommended by Richard Web is not any more working there. Instead I was with 2 young guides but there knowledge was limited. I nevertheless saw 2 Lesser Mouse Deers, 6+ Thomas Giant Flying Squirrels (unknown by the guides and called Black Giant Flying Squirrels), 3+ Red Giant Flying Squirrel and 1 Black Giant Flying Squirrel. By day I only saw 1 Sunda Giant Squirrel and a group of 10+ Pig Tailed Macaques. At the border of the forest I got 1 Ear Spot Squirrel and 2 Prevost Squirrels. In the "gardens" of my accommodation there were several Prevost and Plantain Squirrels.

DEREMAKOT

Surely the best place for mammalwatchers in SABAH. Because of heavy rains before I arrived and even strong showers during my 5 first days there the road was very slippery and rutted not because of the logging but mainly because of the passage of a few cars (mainly from Adventure Alternative Borneo with their very high cars able to pass anywhere in the mud). During my 5 first days I was unable even with a Toyota Hilux to drive the portion of road between the main camp and the river (except on my first morning). Every day a bad portion (6 km from the camp) was getting worst. The road between the gate and the camp was far better. So I mainly visited this area by night. To visit the road between the camp and the river I was able to drive easily the first 6 km, then I had to walk. It was not so bad because with the mud and the potholes of the road it was nearly impossible to drive and spotlight alone. I mainly spotlighted as walking, even walking 18km (way and back) from the "bad place" 6 km from the camp to the river. The last evening I returned to the bad place to see that with no rain for the last 2 days they had smoothed the "bad area" of the road. I decided this night just to drive slowly and look on the road and it paid. I saw first a Leopard Cat on the middle of the road and then, then, then.... a CLOUDED LEOPARD walking on the road and disappearing in the forest. Immediately I sopped the engine, keeping the headlamps on and waited. Soon I saw several lights "coming" from far. I thought it was the car of Mike Gordon, but it was people walking on the road and looking where the leopard had disappeared. I would have done that, but with their lights they called me. I ran on the side of the road (in the grass and on the tip of my feet) and unimaginable I saw the leopard laying on the ground, mouth wide open just 15m of us. My heart beat at more than 100 and I was crying of pleasure. The leopard moved several times (still visible) disturbed by our lamps and disappeared in the forest. The group with me was a group of Mike Gordon (2 Britishs of which at least 1 was working at the WWF). Mike offered me to stay near my car and to wait for them returning to their car, then picking me up to check if the leopard had not returned on the road. We didn't see it again. Then after dropping me at my car they went back to the river and I decided to

return to the camp, tired of my week. And at the only bad place I got stuck in the mud. I knew Mike would come back between 11pm and midnight and didn't worry too much. As I was waiting I saw 2 Thomas Flying Squirrels and a Malay Civet. Of course by 11h30 Mike and his driver pulled me off the mud. What a wonderful night!

During my week at Deremakot I saw 1 male Elephant by day (very few dungs), a Banteng dung, 4 times Sambars (5 in total and by night), 1 Red Muntjak by night, 1 Bornean Yellow Muntjak by day, at least 6 Greater Mouse Deers (day and night) and several unidentified Mouse Deers, 1 Bearded Pig during 3 nights and 1 morning at the camp, 3 Leopard Cats by night (including 1 behind my accommodation), 2 Binturongs sleeping by day in a fruiting tree, 3 Malay Civets by night, several Borneo Striped Palm Civet by night (only 1 seen on the ground), several Island Palm Civets (always on the road), 2 Ear Spot Squirrels, several Prevost Squirrels, many Thomas and Red (less than the former) Giant Flying Squirrels, 2 Black Giant Flying Squirrels, 1 male Orang Outang very close, 1 North Borneo Gibbon and 1 Otter (apparently Hairy Nosed) crossing the road by day light to a very small rivers, several groups of Long Tailed Macaques, 1 group of Pig Tailed Macaques (30), 1 Moonrat (the latter close to the camp by night), 1 Colugo, 1 Philippine Slow Loris and an unidentified treeshrew.

KINABATANGAN RIVER SUKAU GREENVIEW

I came there specially for Flat Headed Cat that I didn't see. My guide told the Menangol River was not good anymore for this species because of dogs (???) and that he wanted to take me downstream of the main river where he knew this species. We went on the Kinabatangan for the first night seeing only many Large Flying Foxes, 4 Bornean Striped Palm Civets and a Bearded Pig. The second night I insisted to go on the Menangol and saw a civet, a Philippine Slow Loris, many rats (I think Müller's rats) and the eyes of 1 animal on the ground. Late by night the river was very quiet, but because of our too large boat we were not able to continue upstream at low tide. I have remarked that a smaller boat with a Malaysian guide and dutch tourists have gone further upstream. They had a privilege I think by giving some money boat. My guide had in fact lied about the presence of dogs along the Menangol. The 2 guides at the lodge wanted to keep me away from the Menangol river.

By day I saw a group of more 106 Pygmy Elephants crossing the river, 3 Silvered Langurs near the Oxbow lake, 7 Red Langurs at the lodge, 4 groups (total 20) of Proboscis Monkeys, many Long Tailed Macaques and a lone male Pig Tailed Macaque.

For Flat Headed Cat Mike Gordon recommended me to go to Batu Putih (it is along the Kinabatangan river), but you have to deal with a boatman (not too difficult if you speak a little of Malaysian as I do).

THE END

I will returned next year as there are many species of squirrels and carnivores to see and that providing that Demerakot stays accessible for independent travelers. The place is becoming busy of tourist what disturbs the area. During my stay there I saw 3 groups of Adventure Alternative Borneo. Of course if there is 1 car of the section of the road where you are it doesn't help. But it was a fantastic trip. I enjoyed to find animals by myself or in a very small group.

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