

Deramakot March 5th-13th 2018

Background

I spent 9 nights in Deramakot in early March 2018. This was my second trip to Deramakot with Adventure Alternative Borneo after a trip last year which finally got me a binturong after nearly four years' worth of failed attempts in Indonesia. I spent 9 nights in Deramakot in this time, 5 nights camping near Balat, and 4 in the main Deramakot accommodation. Saban grizzled langurs/ Grey Sabah langurs (*Presbytis Hosei sabana*) were my number one target this time after Mike Gordon from Adventure Alternative Borneo told me he knew a place to see them. Mike was amazing as I'm sure everyone who has been on a trip with him will agree. He is passionate and knowledgeable and also entertaining company for extended periods of tree watching. I don't think there is much I can say about Mike that hasn't been said. Siti who I had for the final three nights was also superb, and an absolute fiend with invertebrates.

Day one

The first night I spent in the Deramakot accommodation and things started fast with a Phillipine slow loris almost immediately after setting off for a night drive with Mike. That was the first of what would be 9 different primate species in less than 24 hours. We stopped and went on foot to search for the Western Tarsier and sure enough Mike found a couple, the second even putting on a show having a go at nabbing a bat out of the air. The night walk also provided a couple of banded palm civet sightings, the second of which was interrupted by a couple of loud, rumbling growls from down the ravine in the darkness. We searched for the source but nothing came of it so we made our way back to the car.



Mouse deer seemed pretty abundant along the trail too.

I should probably say at this point there were Sambar, Thomas', and red giant flying squirrels were everywhere and I won't mention them again.

Day 2

The second day we made our way further into the forest reserve to a site next to the river which would be the campsite for the next five days. Within moments of arriving and from our lookout point on the far bank of the river, primates three and four made themselves known, with a solitary maroon langur, who ended up somehow becoming the star of the show, and a young North Borneo grey gibbon. The maroon langur proceeded to attack the young gibbon and drive it away until two larger gibbons arrived and the maroon langur took his leave. The gibbons then decided to take over and we were lucky enough to see one come all the way down to the edge of the river and then have to run back along the ground to get back to the forest line. Interestingly the gibbon didn't run with the usual arms in the air comedy fashion they do when grounded in captivity but used a more 'bounding' technique.



By about midday, with the sun blazing and the temperature soaring, the activity on the far bank had ceased and we retreated to the relative cool of the forestry department building for lunch. Confident with the early success and in the knowledge very little would be on the move in such heat we lingered in the shade until about 1.30, and

eventually strolled back over. I hadn't even got back to the lookout point when Mike yelled to announce the Grey Sabah langurs' arrival on the far bank. They hung around for maybe 8 minutes before retreating back into the forest. We attempted to pursue them into the forest after taking the boat across the river but they were already well on their way. It was kind of ridiculous that within a few hours I had already got my number one target.



Mike had arranged a fishing boat piloted by someone from a village further down the river in place of using the much more expensive forestry department boat and he ferried us up the river that afternoon, and every morning and afternoon the days that followed.

Long tailed and Pig tailed macaques followed, and then a female orangutan and her baby. And on the way back the proboscis monkeys were already down by the river getting ready to roost for the night just around the corner from our camp, to make it nine primates in about 22 hours.



We came back and had dinner cooked by Stella and settled down for the night. The heat made sleeping something of a challenge, which ended up contributing to one of the more unexpected sightings of the trip; a flat-headed cat down by the small river right by the forestry department's accommodation.

Day three

The following day was more maroon langurs, proboscis monkeys, and both species of macaques, as we went up and down the river trying to spot the Grey Sabah langurs again. We took a night cruise that night in the hope of meeting the flat-headed cat again but even though we went down a smaller river that the local villagers and forestry officials recommended as a good spot we didn't encounter them again. A leopard cat, malay civets, and common island palm civets were spotted from the boat plus a stunning reticulated python and numerous crocodiles.

Day four

Another early morning cruise down the river was filled with both species of macaque, a crested serpent eagle making off with a vine snake, Prevost's squirrel, and a smooth otter that made an appearance not far from our camp. The trees were fairly quiet during the afternoon before a gibbon made an appearance just prior to us setting out on the boat again.

The afternoon cruise was more macaques, proboscis monkeys, and a White-bellied Rat Snake that swam across the river right in front of the boat.

We went for a night walk along the lower track towards the village further down the river that night to another river that was a potential spot for flat-headed cats. The route had a maddening amount of cat prints but that was all we saw of the cats. There were however common palm civets crossing the path fairly frequently on the way back.

Day 5

The highlight of the morning cruise was a battle between a long tailed macaque and a pigtailed macaque who decided to duke it out on a fallen tree overhanging the river. The long tailed macaque came out on top, and the pig tailed macaque narrowly avoided being dumped into the water. Then more Prevost's squirrels and proboscis monkeys. There was a moment when I thought I was going to get to see the proboscis monkey's fabled swimming prowess but the lone male that came down to the riverside just ran along the river's edge away from the rest of his group before climbing back up into the trees. There was another mother and baby orangutan on the opposite side of the river in the afternoon and then the only solitary orangutan I saw on the whole trip.

Night time we went spotlighting along the road that we had initially entered from and saw a few small toothed palm civets, flying squirrels, and another slow loris.



Day 6

Early morning brought more orangutans. Then we crossed to the patch of forest where we had seen the Grey Sabah langurs on the first day. It wasn't long until we were reunited with the maroon langur we saw on the first day. It was so busy attacking two hornbills that had landed in its tree that we were able to watch him from near the foot of the tree. We also found a couple of gibbons who led us on a bit of chase before we eventually made our way back out of the forest.

Day 7

After the river I stayed a further three nights at the main Deramakot camp to do some of the safaris that so many people go to Deramakot for. I had Siti as my guide who was fantastic. We did a mixture of early morning and late afternoon drives, in addition to being out every night looking for the nocturnal big boys. The first night brought the usual array of small toothed and common palm civets that nearly every night I've spent in Deramakot seems to guarantee, and then all of sudden we had a really cooperative Yellow-throated marten sitting in a tree, relaxing in some vines. And about five minute later we had an otter civet! It seemed to have been hunting for frogs in one of the newly dug gutters that run alongside some of the trails in Deramakot, and ran alongside the vehicle before disappearing. (At this point I should point out the quality of my photos are not due the quality of the sightings but more a reflection of my shambolic skills. I think they do both Mike and Siti a disservice)



Day 8

The second day of jeep safaris brought more orangutans in the day time and some bearded pigs. Then night time we took a drive in the opposite direction back towards the entrance despite some inclement weather. It was quiet until as we were watching a malay civet meandering about the road Siti suddenly fixed the light onto the bushes and said, “banded linsang.” I freaked out. There were some things I was really not expecting to see and that was one of them. It was then I had one of those dreadful moments where no matter how much someone points out the branch, or circles it with a pointer, or draws you a map, you just can’t quite get it. I had a sliver of white but just couldn’t make out the face. It stayed for maybe two minutes, with me getting increasingly more and more desperate, before eventually it moved and I saw its hind legs as it disappeared into the bushes with a flick of its famous tail.

I briefly had something of an existential crisis as we sat in the dark as Siti tried to call it back out, having missed my chance to lock eyes with what is an absolute dream animal, but it gives me yet another glorious excuse to go back, and it was still a banded linsang!

Day 9

A colugo sitting low down on a tree in broad daylight was the highlight of the final afternoon’s drive before the inclement weather set in. The rain continued on and off for the rest of the day and night, and like on my previous trip with the rain came the moon rat. It scampered through the puddles the side of the road at about 9.30ish for about 20 seconds before disappearing into the undergrowth. The final night it was raining Leopard cats and Malay civets, one particular malay civet making a show of gobbling the frog it had just caught right in front of the car. I think five of the eight leopard cats I saw came that night in the rain.



Also I just want to mention the driver, who was great and responsive, and seemed to have a perfect understanding of which sightings required him to hang back and which needed him to make ground fast. I'm hoping to get back to Deramakot again in the next few months to spend some time dedicated to looking for the reserve's big hitters.



Species list

Phillipine slow loris	Otter civet
Maroon langur	Banded palm civet
Pig tailed macaque	Western tarsier
Long tailed macaque	Smooth otter
Hose's langur	Common island palm civet
Borneo Orangutan	Small toothed palm civet
Proboscis monkey	Leopard cat
North Borneo grey gibbon	Flat-headed cat
Sunda bearded pig	Sambar
Black flying squirrel	Thomas' flying squirrel
Prevost's squirrel	Banded linsang
Moon rat	Colugo
Ranee mouse	



