

Phillipps' Field Guide To The Mammals of Borneo And Their Ecology

Author: Quentin Phillipps (Second edition 2018, reprinted 2023)

Quentin Phillipps' hugely enjoyable and innovative book should be a required companion for naturalists visiting all parts of Borneo. Illustrations by his late sister, Karen Phillipps, enhance the book and are a fitting celebration of her contribution to conservation.

As the inclusion of the word ecology in the title requires, there is an early emphasis on how mammal distribution and behaviour has been, and continues to be, influenced by the geology and flora of different regions of Borneo as well as human activity. For example, the early ecological section on seed size, fruits, dispersal and mammalian dispersers, is informative and stimulating. I could give more examples of this approach but it is best left to the reader to dip into and out of this section. It is well worth it, as is a careful read of the extensive end section on recommended mammal viewing sites in Sabah, Brunei, Sarawak and Kalimantan.

The central, largest section is devoted to a systematic coverage of the mammals, all illustrated by photographs or Karen's drawings. Here, yellow 'information boxes' enable Quentin to add short notes on a range of topics ranging from early naturalists such as Whitehead and Low, extra details of mammal biology such as 'Civet Perfumes' or 'Banana Leaves and Roosting Bats', to the knowledge of indigenous people of Borneo. They also enable him to 'step back' from providing 'field notes' in order to be speculative and provocative. The book is worth a read just for these yellow boxes! There is also fascinating 'in depth' coverage of some of the 'high profile' mammals such as the proboscis monkey, clouded leopard and pigmy elephant.

In truth, although this is entitled a 'Field Guide' and justifiably so, it is so much more since it can be read solely as an illuminating introduction to Borneo's different habitats, especially its rain forests. This is not a small guide to be slipped into a pocket on setting out on a wildlife trek; rather it is a hugely enjoyable and informative overview of Borneo's mammals, their uncertain futures and conservation challenges associated with them.

Martin Parry November 2023

