

# Singapore and Johor, Malaysia

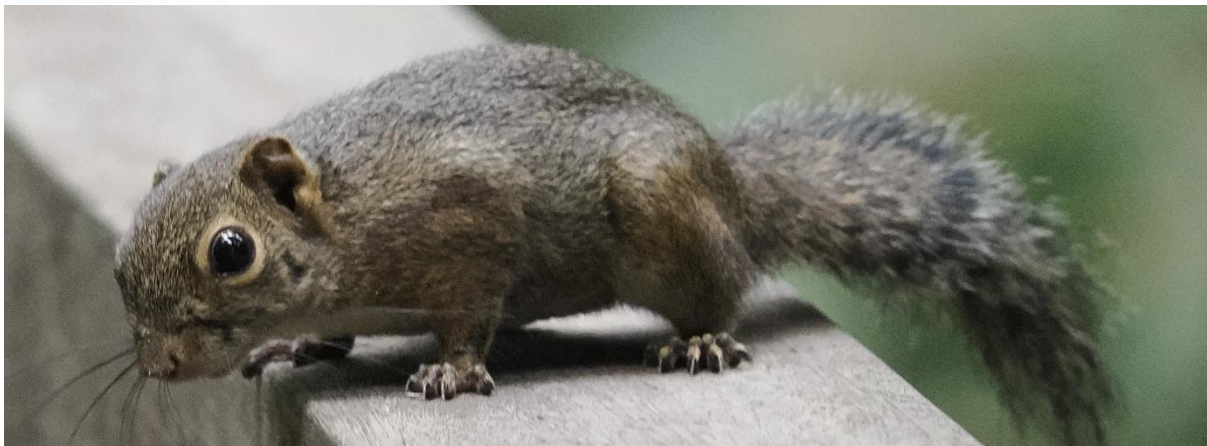
Michael Johnson, July 2023

Back In July I made my first trip to Asia since COVID. I was in Singapore for a few days for work and had a little time available for wildlife watching. I followed this up by two nights in Johor, Malaysia, primarily for birds, although a few mammals were seen.

I arrived in the evening and had the next day free. I thought I would try to pick up a few of the mammals that can be found in Singapore that are not yet on my list, of course recording anything else that comes along.

First stop was to see Finlayson's squirrel, a species found mainly through Indo-China that escaped from the pet trade and has established a small population just to the north-east of the city around Woodleigh Park. Looking at iNaturalist the epicentre of the population seemed to be a small park called Bidadari Park. I arrived at the park to find it boarded up. Apparently, a new development is going forward. While individual squirrels can be found through the surrounding suburbs, there seemed little point in wandering around hoping to see one.

Next stop was Lower Peirce Reservoir Park. Chevrotains are commonly seen here, but not by me. On the trail I met two locals who informed me "black monkeys" (Raffle's langur) were to be seen near the end of the trail and gave me some advice as to how to see them. The langurs were gone by the time I got there, although I did see a **wild boar**, and both **plantain** and **slender squirrels**. I proceeded on to the nearby Thomson Nature Park. While I saw a few birds. soon after midday I was hit by a tropical downpour, and got soaked to the skin, so went back to the hotel.



After drying off and a late lunch I headed off to Chestnut Nature Park, which I thought might be good for the langurs. On the way the taxi driver was concerned about the dangers that monkeys and boar presented There were plenty of **long-tailed macaques** hanging around the car park, but I was able to evade that danger and go deeper into the park. It turns out it was a good location for **Raffle's banded langurs**. About a kilometre along the northern trail, I came across a group of young animals. I did not get great views as they were a fair way back into the forest. It was getting late and, on the trail back, after being menaced by a protective wild boar with family nearby, about a hundred metres from the end I also saw a **chevrotain** as it ducked back into cover. A taxi picked me up about half past seven, and the driver was concerned I had not had my dinner at 6pm like all good Singaporeans.

Species seen in Singapore (new species in **bold**)

Long-tailed macaque *Macaca fasciculari*

**Raffles banded langur** *Presbytis femoralis*

Plantain squirrel *Callosciurus notatus*

Slender squirrel *Sundasciurus tenuis*

Wild boar *Sus scrofa*

**Lesser oriental chevrotain** *Tragulus kanchil*

### Panti Forest Reserve, Johor, Malaysia



The trade show in Singapore being over, I headed over the border into Malaysia. I have arranged for a guide through MY Birding, who also arranged accommodation etc. I stayed two nights. Just to make it clear, no I didn't see a Malaysian tapir. While I saw a few mammals, this section is more about the potential of the Panti Forest as a mammal watching destination. I went for the birds, and indeed the birding is excellent. I saw 58 species, although I missed the main target, the unusual rail-babbler.

As it happened the first animal seen was a mammal. We pulled up and caught a **dusky langur** on the ground, which quickly climbed a tree and swung off into the forest. A large family group was also seen the next day. Long-tailed macaques were constantly seen while a **southern-pig-tailed macaque** paraded across the road at one point. Both squirrel species were also seen. Siamangs and lar gibbons were both heard calling frequently.

So, what of its potential as a mammaling destination? First thing to say is that it would almost certainly require hiring a car. Not that that is a particular problem as driving in Malaysia is quite easy. The nearest town is Kuta Tinggi, an ordinary Malaysian town that does not offer a lot to the visitor. It has however the nearest accommodation to the Reserve as well as the nearest restaurants and food stores. Keep this in mind as the Reserve is about half an hour's drive from town and any food or water you want must be brought with you. The town itself is about one hour's drive from Johor Barat, the crossing point between Singapore and Malaysia.

Birders use the Bunker Trail, a reasonably wide and maintained dirt road running through the northern part of the reserve. The Bunker Trail is suitable for ordinary cars, at least in dry weather. Probably the biggest problem is that as a Forest Reserve, a permit is required. The permit must be obtained from the Forest Department offices in Johor Barat and apparently might take a couple of weeks.

The good news is that authorities apparently don't have any objections to the reserve being accessed at night. On the second night we stayed on till after dark and I used a torch to spotlight as

my guide drove slowly out to the highway. I did pick up some eyeshine but could not make anything of it. The Reserve's mammal list also seems to be quite comprehensive.

What about the tapir? There are several of these signs where the highway runs close to the southern part of the Reserve, so obviously there is an issue with them crossing the road there. I'm guessing slowly driving up and down the highway in the early hours might be a way to see one.

Species seen in Panti Forest Reserve

Southern pig-tailed macaque *Macaca nemestrina*

Long-tailed macaque *Macaca fasciculari*

Dusky langur *Trachypithecus obscurus*

Plantain squirrel *Callosciurus notatus*

Slender squirrel *Sundasciurus tenuis*

Also heard: siamangs and white-handed gibbons.