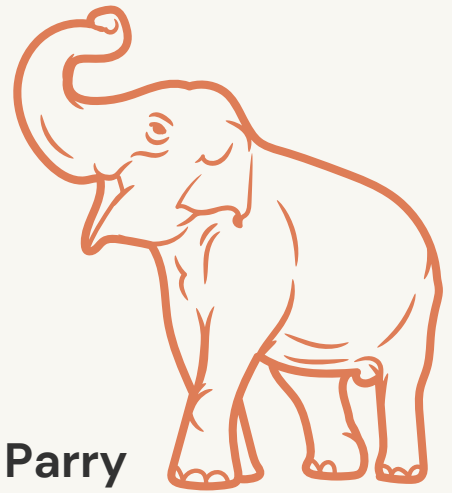


1StopBorneo Wildlife

# Alternative mammal-watching destinations in BORNEO



**By Shavez Cheema edited by Martin Parry**

As I write this towards the end of 2023, it is clear that mammal watching is continuing to pick up year by year on Borneo. This is especially true in Sabah, where existing destinations are more popular than ever. Increasing numbers of wildlife guides are being trained as ecotourism companies see the opportunity to expand. However, to sustain successful wildlife tourism, two things are also essential: good and reliable infrastructure including road connectivity and accommodation with food options but also, most importantly, the wildlife itself.

Amongst the most popular mammal-watching destinations on Borneo are undoubtedly Deramakot Forest Reserve, Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, Danum Valley Conservation Area, Sepilok (including the Orang Utan Rehabilitation Centre) and Tabin Wildlife Reserve; these are all in Sabah. 'Drives' are often the preferred method to see many mammals, although they are not used in Kinabatangan or Sepilok, for example. These destinations are becoming busier and so it is here that infrastructure and wildlife are under most pressure. In some Parks prices have skyrocketed and it has become so busy that they are becoming totally booked out well in advance; there may be too many cars close together on packed roads and no spaces on existing jeeps; in both situations this will reduce the quality and quantity of mammal sightings.

In this article, I am aiming to highlight alternative potential mammal watching destinations on Borneo and am urging visitors to consider them. The reason why the destinations I've listed above are doing so well is often not just because they have more animals but because there are more people on their roads every day! In the 'alternative list' below, there are examples of great mammal diversity and good opportunities to see them.

In all of them my organisation, 1StopBorneoWildlife, has undertaken multiple trips for mammal watching and surveying; as a result, we know they can offer exciting opportunities.



## My 'Alternative List'

More details on many of these are included in the final section of Phillipps' Field Guide to the Mammals of Borneo.

### 1. Maliau Basin Conservation Area (Sabah)

Maliau Basin can be reached by a long drive from Tawau Airport (4h) or Kota Kinabalu (6h). Once there, it has 'everything': good accommodation and catering, an extensive network of good roads and plenty of wildlife. Its accommodation has greater capacity than many other destinations.

Mammals recently seen: Clouded Leopard, Banteng, Bornean Elephant, Squirrels, Marbled Cat and Civets.

Recommended stay: 4-6 nights



## 2. INIKEA Forest Rehabilitation Project (Sabah)

It does not have options of good accommodation although it offers adequate catering and has a good road network. INIKEA supports some great wildlife. It is reached by a 2.5h drive from Tawau Town and is located close to Kalabakan Town.

Mammals recently seen: Clouded Leopard, Sabah Grey Leaf Langur, Banteng and Binturong

Recommended stay: 2-3 nights



### 3. Ulu Belait & Temburong National Park (Brunei Darussalam)

It is not widely known but the Kingdom of Brunei still has substantial forest cover; it is sparsely populated outside its capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, and its wildlife benefits from a lack of industrialisation. It has a few good road networks for drives, such as in Ulu Belait, Melilas, Teraja and Kuala Balai. Temburong National Park is also worth visiting for day trips, especially if there are good fruiting figs and vines, although access is strictly controlled and there are no 'drives' available. Accommodation in towns is good but usually a stay at a longhouse is recommended, although here the lodging is often basic.

Mammals recently seen: Bornean Porcupine, Marbled Cat, Slow Loris

Recommended stay: 2-3 nights



#### 4. Kinabalu Park, (Sabah)

Many mammals have already been lost due to illegal hunting and sadly this still continues in some villages in the region around Kinabalu Park. However, the Park itself remains the squirrel 'hotspot' for Borneo with a range of both montane and lowland species found here. Banded linsang and Hose's civet can be seen here and it is perhaps the place that offers the best opportunity to spot the rare Kinabalu Ferret Badger. There is a good choice of accommodation as well as adequate catering. There is a 4 km road leading to the Timpohon Gate within the Park and so mammal watching can be done from the roadside; in addition, there is a good network of trails within the Park Headquarters and at Sayap Substation.

Mammals recently seen: Spotted Flying Squirrel, Banded Binsang, Whitehead's Pigmy Squirrel, Kinabalu Squirrel and Kinabalu Ferret Badger.

Recommended stay: 2-3 nights



## 5. Tawau Hills Park (Sabah)

Tawau Hills Park is the main conservation destination in the Tawau Region of Sabah; 1StopBorneoWildlife is based within the Park's Headquarters. There is no road network but it offers adequate catering and, importantly, there are extensive trekking trails maintained in the Park, including some to the Park's mountains.

Other destinations near Tawau Hills Park

It is possible to watch Borneo elephant\*, proboscis monkey\* and dolphin\* on day trips from the Park.

Mammals recently seen: Red Leaf Monkey, North Bornean Gibbon, Proboscis Monkey\*, Borneo Elephant\*, Irrawaddy Dolphin\*

(\* Destinations for these mammals reached on day trips from the Park.)

Recommended stay: 3 nights



## 6. Tanjung Datu National Park (Sarawak)

Although Sarawak is generally no longer a recommended destination for mammal watching, it does have two areas worth considering. Firstly, Tanjung Datu National Park can be surprisingly good: it remains one of the few destinations where the Sarawak langur and Abbot's gibbon might be seen. To reach the park, there is a 2.5h drive on decent roads from Kuching to the village of Teluk Melanau; from there it is either a 15min boat ride or a 2 hour walk along a marked pathway to the Park Headquarters. Basic accommodation is offered at a campsite style area. Meals are self-catering and groceries should be bought beforehand in Kuching or Teluk Melano.

Mammals recently seen: Sarawak langur, Abbot's gibbon

Recommended stay: 2 nights



## 7. Bakelalan (Sarawak)

The second destination in Sarawak is Bakelalan, a group of villages in the Maligan Highlands. The area can be reached by either flying from Miri or Lawas or driving from Lawas. There are multiple homestays offering accommodation and food in Bakelalan, for example the Owl Homestay.

Mammals recently seen: Tufted Ground Squirrel.

Recommended stay: 3 nights





## A FUTURE TRIP?

1StopborneoWildlife,

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is offering to organise a mammal watching trip for the above species, entitled 'Rarest Borneo Mammals'.

These are some of the rarest species in the world and so the chances of seeing them are often low!

1StopBorneo Wildlife also organizes 2-3 weeks mammal-watching trips in Borneo



**2 Week Mammal Watching Tour**

Come Experience the amazing mammals of Borneo with 1stopBorneoWildlife!

For more information, please contact:  
**1stopborneo@gmail.com or +60128248052**

What's included: basic accommodation, transportation, basic meals, conservation fees, ecologist guide, park fees, tree planting, four wheel safari, boat cruises, basically everything except beers and flights!

Isn't it time for you to be more adventurous and try some of these 7 exciting mammal-watching destinations?

### Suggested reading

1. A Pocket Guide to Mammals of Borneo by Shavez Cheema:

<https://www.mammalwatching.com/community-post/a-pocket-guide-to-mammals-of-borneo-author-shavez-cheema-2020/>

2. Phillipps Guide to Mammals of Borneo by Quentin Phillipps:

<https://www.mammalwatching.com/community-post/phillipps-field-guide-to-the-mammals-of-borneo-and-their-ecology-author-quentin-phillipps-second-edition-2018-reprinted-2023/>

3. Parry, M. (2023) Review of the book The Hairy Sumatran Rhino by Payne, J.

<https://www.mammalwatching.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/The-Hairy-Rhinoceros-by-John-Payne.pdf>

4. Parry, M. (2023). Review of the book An Illustrated Guide to Bornean Orangutan Food Plants by Payne,

J.44 and Zainuddin, Z. Z. <https://www.mammalwatching.com/community-post/an-illustrated-guide-to-bornean-orangutan-food-plants-2023-authors-john-payne-zainal-zahari-zainuddin/>

5. Mathai, J. (2019) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2351989418302981>

6. Banks, G.S. (2021) <https://www.kent.ac.uk/anthropology-conservation/news/6819/rare-flying-rodent-caught-on-camera-for-first-time-in-sabah-forests>

6. Duijvestijn, J. (2023) <https://www.mammalwatching.com/community-post/mystery-pygmy-flying-squirrel-on-borneo/>