

Bintan Island, Indonesia, April 21-24 2022

A belated trip report to Bintan Island in search of the endemic Bintan island langur (*Presbytis siamensis rhionis*). Information about the langur was very hard to come by when preparing for the trip and I was very fortunate to get in contact with Ayu Dewi Karuniawati, who lives on Bintan, and at the time seemed to be the only person seemingly aware of the langurs and possible locations where they could be seen.

Ayu was absolutely amazing and one of the most dedicated and passionate people I have had the privilege of meeting on my primate journeys. I flew direct from Jakarta and got picked up from the place I would be staying, Kamuela Villas Lagoi. The accommodation was possibly the fanciest I have ever stayed in on a primate trip, and it kind of felt a bit like cheating, staying somewhere so comfortable. The Villa was in the north of the island, which according to what little information I had found, was prime Bintan langur country. Indonesia was only just getting going again after covid, which meant there were very few people around, and many places were closed.

Ayu picked me up from the Villa once I had checked in and outlined the plan and most likely spots. Bintan has a lot of restricted areas and private property, which without Ayu's local knowledge and incredibly high street cred, would have been inaccessible. I really cannot stress enough how amazing Ayu was throughout. The bemused looks on so many security guards faces as Ayu explained we needed access because we were looking for the black and white monkey is something I will never forget. Ayu is constantly educating people and spreading the word about the langur and the threats it faces.

The first mammals of the trip were the ubiquitous long-tailed macaques that played along the sides of the road. They were generally the more feral kind of macaque, used to getting handouts from tourists and stealing stuff from unsuspecting doofuses.



Give us yer bengbengs!

The first destination was the now abandoned dorms of the hotel workers. It had pretty much been left to ruin once all the hotel workers had been laid off during covid. The forest at the rear was prime langur habitat, and just before dusk we heard the langur's alarm call after a few hours of staking out that area. However, the langurs stayed out of sight, despite our best efforts to get close. There was an incredible amount of mosquitos in the forest, and one rather obese water monitor that could barely even run away it was so overweight.

Day two, we started out early, with assistance from one of Ayu's many contacts, Henry, who took us to a patch of forest not too far from where we had heard the calls the previous night. There was a small patch of rubber trees that he said the langurs liked to visit some mornings. We searched around this area for a few hours, before, having not having heard or seen any sign of the langurs, moving to another area. We drove across to the university campus, where the langurs are sometimes seen by Ayu, and from the videos she showed me, often seen at quite close range in the trees at the back of the campus. The langurs were not here either, just more long-tailed macaques, and some squirrels. (I can only report that squirrels were brown, numerous, and squirrel sized.)

We drove to another regular langur spot, near a rather large rhino statue, and entered the forest. We tried our best, but once again the langurs were nowhere to be found. As we were getting into the car to return to the first spot, we were greeted by the second primate of the trip, as a group of silvery langurs (*Trachypithecus cristatus*) crashed through the trees just to the side of the road. These guys were pretty chill for silvery langurs and we got good extended views before leaving to continue the search for the Bintan langurs. We were accompanied by another of Ayu's langur watching team, Dodi, who had been on lookout by the forest near the dorms, when we returned to the original spot. We waited patiently until it was dark but the trees remained langurless.



Silvery langur

We had been planning to do one of the night boat rides through the mangroves that are famous for the fireflies and provide pretty good chances of mangrove cat snakes and reticulated pythons. This was abandoned as there was still more languring to do the following day.

By the third afternoon, we were still without a langur, but Ayu had not yet ran out of places, or contacts to call on, to get us in to those places. We had an anxious wait outside Club Med, as it appeared we had found a place outside of even Ayu's reach. A few phone calls later and we were in and greeted by Eddy, the groundsman, who knew a few places around the grounds that the langurs liked to frequent. There was a rather hilarious moment where one of the very fancily suited security, who had been looking mightily unimpressed with allowing two uninvited, rather sweaty, mud-covered individuals access, was moments later excitedly showing us pictures from a few weeks previous, of the langurs chilling in the middle of the access road. Eddy instructed us board the back of his little waste-removal truck and he drove us to a patch of forest right next to the sea.

Within about forty minutes we heard the langurs calling. It was quite close at first, then over the next hour and a half or so, we heard them infrequently, sometimes seemingly just agonizingly out of sight, other times much farther away. Eventually, we saw movement in the trees, but any hopes were quickly dashed, as it became apparent our old friends, the long-tailed macaques had returned and scared the langurs away. Ayu, Eddy, Dodi, and Henry, had all said similar things over the previous three days; if the macaques were around, then the langurs would not be.

Thwarted at the last, we said goodbye to Eddy and his glorious truck, and knowing this had been our last realistic chance of seeing the langurs before returning to Jakarta the following morning, we got back in the car feeling somewhat defeated. We got to the junction at the end of the access road and could see the access gate back to the main road to the right. The security at the gate had made it clear not to go off galivanting around the golf course to the left. In and out to Club Med only. Fortunately, Ayu had other plans and there was a quite ridiculous feeling of joy as she spun the wheel to the left and we set off towards the golf course. The dream was alive! It was getting pretty late by this point and there was no time for the groups of silvery langurs that hung around low down at the sides of the road.

We were just beginning to wonder where to turn the car around, when there was a whole bunch of crashing in the trees at the side of the road. I don't know who squealed the loudest, but Ayu, Dodi, and myself, all made some pretty strange noises at it became apparent what was jumping in the trees. A group of 11th-hour Bintan langurs!



Wooooo! Bintan's finest.

It was a fairly large group with more than one baby, and a good few juveniles, and we got good views as they jumped off higher and deeper into the forest. I attempted to follow deeper, but they were moving fast, and quickly disappeared as langurs do.



Trademark langur branch of doom photo

As I was going up and down the tree line hoping to find a straggler who had yet to bolt, Ayu started waving at me to come back towards the car. It quickly became apparent I was missing something. I hopped in the car and we rolled forwards a short distance, and then I saw what Ayu had beckoned me for. There was a family of Bintan langurs sat right in the middle of an abandoned road.



Rhionis roadblock

They sat eating for a short time, before bounding closer, then jumping up into the trees on the property of an abandoned resort. We got to watch them playing and jumping around as the light faded, before eventually they disappeared and we set off back towards the main gate.



Juvenile female

We celebrated with some amazing seafood and then went off to bed, thrilled but exhausted. The next day more seafood and the first bad weather as the skies opened during lunch and the drive back to the airport.

Otters can be seen around the beach at Club Med. Eddy had a few good videos of them playing in the surf and running up the beach. I am not sure what kind of otters they are. Eddy also had a good knowledge of snakes and had regular sightings of what he Wagler's pit vipers, king cobras, and reticulated pythons.

Bintan is pretty easy to access from Singapore by ferry which takes just over an hour. Ayu is trying to develop eco-tourism around the langur and is doing great things to help spread awareness and protect the langur. She has an in-depth knowledge and passion for the langur that is genuinely great fun and inspiring to be around. It is always cool when the person helping you is just as excited as you are about seeing the target.

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