

# Malaysia

## 9 - 20 July 2025

Borneo is one of the most remarkable mammal-watching destinations on the planet and in July 2025 I had the opportunity to spend a week on the island, preceded by a few days in the rather less natural landscape of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia's capital. As this was my first trip to Southeast Asia with wildlife in mind, I anticipated that this would be an extraordinary opportunity to correct my hitherto-limited experience with the region's birds and mammals, and even convinced my family to book a 5-day 'wildlife' tour to maximise my chances. Apart from a day on either side, we organised the trip through Borneo Eco Tours (BET) as part of a regular tour package going to the Kinabatangan, Tabin Wildlife Reserve and (much to my dismay) the turtle nesting site Selingan Island. As it turned out, this may not have been the best decision for mammalwatching, but more on that later.

As with my previous trips, I experienced some setbacks due to family. In particular, Deramakot was off-limits due to my siblings' limited tolerance for anything that could be considered 'rustic', and the BRL at Danum proved to be way out of our price range for 5 people. Further, BET changed the location of our stay from the renowned Tabin Wildlife Resort to the newly opened Utan Rainforest Lodge on the northern border of Tabin, with no way for me to know how it would prove from a wildlife perspective. However, I came into this trip better prepared than in the past, having finally worked out how to operate the thermal scope (though perhaps I should have expected the device to require batteries!).

This report can be divided into 2 sections, namely the time in KL and that in Sabah. While I initially contemplated omitting the former, given the number of travellers that pass through here I have included it on the basis that it may be useful for those who want to see a few key species during a short transit through the city. In this report, mammal sightings are listed in ***bold italics*** for the first mention of each species, and thereafter observations are mentioned in **bold**.

---

## Kuala Lumpur 09 - 12 July

**09/07/25:** We arrived in KL at night, and quickly settled into our hotel overlooking KLCC park. Waking up at dawn, I soon picked up my first mammal in the form of a **Southern Grey-bellied Squirrel**, busily foraging in a tree just metres away from my vantage point. The rest of the day passed by without any sightings of note, as the schedule was occupied by sightseeing around the city centre. In the evening I set up the thermal in the hope of finding a civet in the park, but to no avail.

**10/07/25:** Once again, our itinerary made little space for mammals, barring a brief visit to the Batu caves. Situated in a tiny patch of remnant forest, the walk to and from the chambers provided sightings of many habituated **Long-tailed Macaques**, as well as a single **Common Treeshrew** in the undergrowth. Unfortunately the main target, Dusky Langur, eluded view in spite of my efforts to scan every tree on the hillside, perhaps due to the massive numbers of macaques in the area. After a few hours at a rather obnoxious water park, we returned to the hotel to once again search fruitlessly for civets.

**11/07/25:** My third day in KL was the first opportunity for real mammalwatching, and an exciting one at that. When planning the trip, my dad had agreed to one day of bird/mammal watching, with my initial aim being a trip to Bukit Tinggi for siamangs. However, less than a month before we left I found a place offering day tours to Frasers Hill and promptly booked it, despite less-than-promising reviews.

After a very early start, I was picked up by a driver and began the long drive to Fraser Hill in the dark, finally arriving at 7:30 after a delay caused by a large tree landing on the road! Around the Gap, I quickly spotted a troop of **Southern Pig-tailed Macaques**, soon followed by a handful of their smaller **Long-tailed Macaque** cousins. At the hill itself, we met up with a bird guide and began a loop of the main road. While the primary focus was on birding, my efforts were rewarded on the mammalwatching front by **Himalayan Striped**, **Asian Red-cheeked** and **Southern Grey-bellied Squirrels**, along with a small group of **White-thighed Surilis** quietly feeding in the canopy near the entrance to the Bishop's trail. We also heard a distant **Siamang** in this area, but despite (or perhaps because of) my guide's attempts to attract it with hooting we neither saw nor heard it again. Bird wise, we recorded 40 species including long-tailed broadbill, little pied flycatcher, silver-eared mesia, rusty-naped pitta and, to my surprise, a great argus calling in the forest on the way up. Driving back from the hill, I spotted several more troops of macaques before being dropped off at the hotel, where after a few hours of tourist nonsense I proceeded on a night walk in search of civets, though with no more luck than the previous nights.

**12/07/25:** Waking before dawn in the hope of seeing one final lifer in KL, this day proved to be a case study in the difficulties of mammalwatching with family! In the lead up to this trip, I found reports of Selangor Silvered Langurs around the KLCC eco park, and was keen to check them out. However, it proved to be quite an endeavour dragging the others out in search of them, and by the time we arrived at the site things were not looking good. The 'track' network proved to be a noisy, tourist-filled maze of canopy walkways and bitumen trails, with seemingly no wildlife at all. Nonetheless, I decided to give the langurs a try. Two hours later, we had walked 4 loops of the park and seen only a **Southern Grey-bellied Squirrel**. By this point everyone was getting exhausted, and I was eventually forced to concede defeat and move to the next site on the itinerary.



**Above:** Southeast Asian Palm Civet

**Right:** Southern Grey-bellied Squirrel, White-thighed Surili



In the evening, I found myself with one final chance to try for the civets, but after my string of dips I was not optimistic. Arriving in the park just after the conclusion of the sound and light show, I was amazed to immediately spot a **Southeast Asian Palm Civet** through the thermal, soon followed by another that gave great views with the spotlight. Such is the way things go with mammalwatching...

## Sabah 13 - 20 July

**13/07/25:** After a morning flight out of KL, we arrived in Sandakan in the early afternoon and checked into the Sabah Hotel in the centre of town. We had booked a night tour at Sepilok in the evening, so after a quick rest we set off towards the RDC. Making a

beeline for the canopy walkway in time for the squirrel flyout (seeing a **Prevost's Squirrel** on the way), we arrived just in time to see a **Red Giant Flying Squirrel** peering out from its' box before the rain started. And then got stronger. And stronger. Cutting a long story short, it continued to rain for the remainder of the evening, and the night tour was duly cancelled. Slightly dejected, I returned to the hotel to do futile circles of the garden with the thermal, seeing only a few geckoes and an unidentifiable microbat whilst getting completely drenched.



**Above:** Red Giant Flying Squirrel, Prevost's Squirrel

**14/07/25:** With the rain having eased off, I was up again before dawn with the thermal scope. Whilst this didn't turn up any mammals, an early morning walk into the weedy scrub behind the hotel rewarded me with many **Plantain Squirrels** and a single **Prevost's Squirrel**, the latter something of a surprise given the urban surroundings. We were then collected by our guide for the next week and embarked on a boat ride to the Selingan Turtle Island. I had little hope for any mammals whilst here, so I instead concentrated my efforts on birding, seeing a nicobar pigeon in addition to the common species on the island. As dusk approached, we waited in the restaurant for news of the turtles. Surprisingly, this actually provided my first lifer of the day, in the rather unremarkable form of an **Oriental House Rat**. We were then called to the shore to watch a green sea turtle laying, before returning to the hatchery for releases. Nearby, a scan of a fruiting fig rewarded me with a few **Variable Flying Foxes**, but they took flight under the spotlight and evaded my attempts at photography. Soon afterwards, a storm hit the island, putting an end to the evening activities.

**15/07/25:** The morning saw another early start, as I decided to walk around the island before breakfast in the hope of relocating the nicobar pigeon. Whilst I saw neither this nor any mammals, I did finally find a barred rail behind the beach. Arriving back on the



mainland, our guide drove us to the Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre at Sepilok. With little interest in seeing the orangutans here, I spent the 3 hours allotted to the sanctuary walking the boardwalks, seeing **Long-tailed** and **Southern Pig-tailed Macaque** and many **Prevost's Squirrels** as well as a pair of rhinoceros hornbills.



**Above:** Silvery Langur, Long-tailed Macaque

Leaving the sanctuary, we stopped briefly for lunch before boarding a speedboat down the Kinabatangan River towards Sukau Rainforest Lodge. On the way, I spotted many **Proboscis Monkeys** and **Long-tailed Macaques** by the riverside. Following a brief introduction and check-in at the lodge reception, I dropped my bags off in the villa and spent an hour looking around the lodge complex and adjacent boardwalk. This proved to be a good decision, with no fewer than 12 **Silvery Langurs** in the forest at the back of the resort, including the only red ones I saw on the trip, as well as **Long-tailed** and **Southern Pig-tailed Macaque** and the 2 commonest squirrels, **Prevost's** and **Plantain**. At 5, we once again met with the guide and proceeded on a short boat safari down the Menanggol River. It soon emerged that, as talented as our guide may have been in the hospitality side of things, he just wasn't a wildlife guide, and it was up to me to try to find anything other than the most popular species. Accordingly, I saw plenty of birds and **Proboscis Monkeys**, but no new mammal species. After dinner, the nightly rains came in and, once again, the night activity was cancelled, but by 9 the storm had passed and I set out onto the boardwalk, seeing the small but distinctive form of a **Philippine** (based on location) **Slow Loris** in the canopy before going to bed.

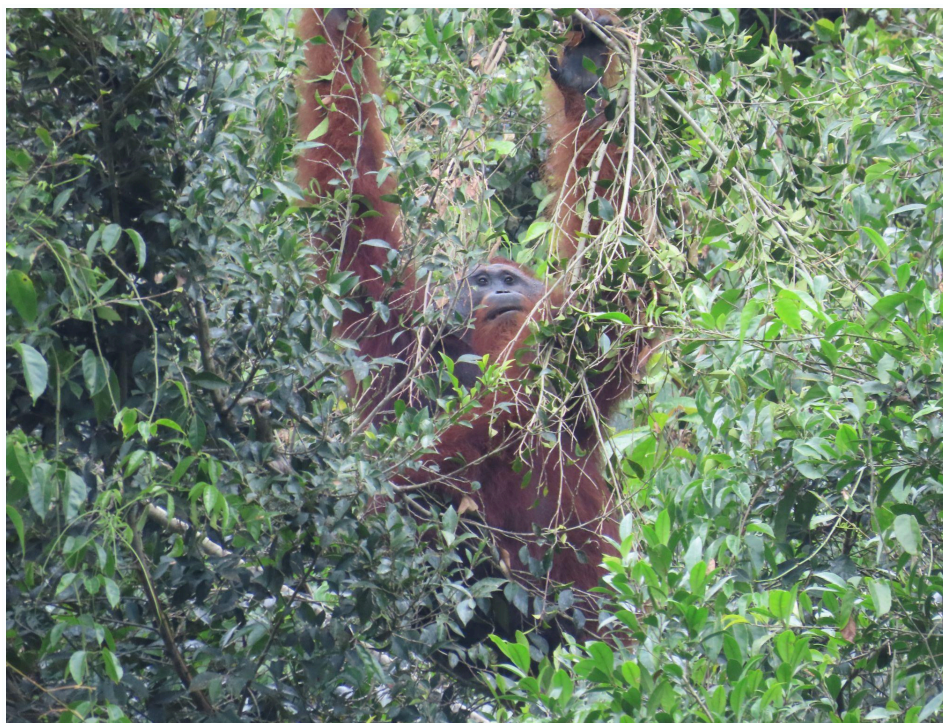
**16/07/25:** The morning's boat cruise was predominately focused on birding, and as such we saw only the common monkeys and a **Prevost's Squirrel**. However, I did see several hornbill species, bringing my total to 7 of Borneo's 8 resident species. The rest of the morning was spent around the lodge, where in addition to the resident macaques

and **Silvery Langurs** I saw a **Pale Giant Squirrel**. In general, all of the above species seem to be abundant in the resort, but peculiarly I saw neither the langurs nor the squirrels on the river itself.



In the afternoon, we had a difficult choice. With only one session left, we could either go on a boat cruise in search of orangutans and elephants but have little chance of seeing any other lifers, or visit the Gomantong caves. On balance, we decided to visit the caves, myself because of the 3 - 5 bat species present and the reliable maroon langurs outside (not to mention the reliable presence of bat hawks)! Sure enough, the forest just past the entrance to the caves turned up several **Maroon Langurs**, before we spotted something larger moving through the trees. Within a few moments, it materialised as a massive flanged male **Bornean Orangutan** which remained in view for the next 10 minutes as we watched it from afar, before swinging into the foliage and out of sight. Continuing into the caves, I was able to identify **Wrinkle-lipped**, **Fawn Roundleaf** and **Creagh's Horseshoe Bats** at their respective colonies within the dark cave, before proceeding to the white cave to watch as they dispersed across the floodplain, pursued by bat hawks and serpent eagles. Back at the lodge, we settled in for dinner and I again registered for the night cruise. Whilst waiting, the other group regaled us with their sightings. Needless to say, it was painful.





**Left:** Bornean Orangutan

**Below:** Maroon Langur, Creagh's Horseshoe Bat, Wrinkle-lipped Bat



Elephants aside, I left the others in the room and proceeded to the jetty. I had read that July was a good time for flat-headed cats, but there had been an unusual amount of rain and the river was swollen, so the odds were not looking good. Whilst the forecast looked dodgy, we pushed ahead, and were rewarded with sightings of several ***Small-toothed Palm Civets*** in a fruiting tree, in addition to various birds. However, disaster struck less than 20 minutes in: as we approached the Menanggol tributary, the best bet for cats, our guide changed their mind, and we instead motored along the riverside. With no way to protest this decision in a boat with 6 people, there was nothing to be done, and we cruised along the shore seeing absolutely nothing, mammalian or otherwise. Just before the lodge, eyeshine near the bank proved to be a ***Philippine Palm Civet***, casting a small silver lining on the whole ordeal. At the boardwalk, an hour of spotlighting revealed no mammals, but I did hear a bay owl calling.

**17/07/25:** With an early departure planned, I squeezed in one more lap of the boardwalk in the pre-dawn light. Here, I found my first and only **Low's Squirrels**, a common squirrel that nonetheless seems under-reported by visitors, before hopping onto the boat and leaving for the next stage of our trip, the Tabin Wildlife Reserve. Or so I thought when we were booking. As we had been told before the tour, our booking had, in fact, been changed to Utan Rainforest Lodge, which, for all I knew, may or may not be in Tabin. After a 4 hour overland journey, during which I saw several **Southern Pig-tailed Macaques**, the facts began to become clear. Given the status of the reserve, it wasn't actually possible to build in it, so instead it was constructed from renovated sheds on the edge of a plantation in the Sungai Kapur Virgin Jungle Reserve, a small and degraded reserve straddling the northeastern border of Tabin in predominately secondary forest.



**Above:** Low's Squirrel, Sunda Leopard Cat, Philippine Palm Civet, Marbled Cat

As it turned out, this was not much of an issue, and over the course of the afternoon I, along with another birder in the group, observed a **Bornean Orangutan** and **Horse-tailed Squirrel**, as well as **Southern Pig-tailed Macaque**, **Prevost's Squirrel**



and many new birds. There were also many signs of elephants in the forest, including some very fresh droppings. In the evening, we set out on a river cruise, an activity that seemed rather unremarkable after the Kinabatangan. Nonetheless, we saw several macaques and **Proboscis Monkeys**, and were treated to the spectacle of dozens of fireflies alighting over the river after dark. After dinner, we boarded a safari vehicle for a night drive along the perimeter road separating the forest from the oil palm estates. We saw several unidentifiable rodents, and enjoyed sightings of a **Sunda Leopard Cat**, **Marbled Cat** and **Philippine Palm Civets**. Afterwards, a night walk down the access road turned up another civet, as well as a few species of nocturnal bird.

**18/07/25:** With activities planned for most of the morning, I was again up at dawn for a walk down the access road, seeing several **North Bornean Gibbons** in the trees on either side. Meeting up with the rest of the group before breakfast, we made our way to the hides placed strategically around the reserve, seeing several endemic birds including Sabah partridge. After a short wait, rustling in the undergrowth proved to be a **Sunda Stink Badger**, which crashed through the undergrowth at a surprising pace before disappearing into a thicket, allowing me to take only the dodgiest of phone photos in the pre-dawn light. Several **Southern Pig-tailed Macaques** also checked out the hide as we were waiting.



**Above:** Lesser Mouse Deer, North Bornean Gibbon, Sunda Stink Badger

Having skipped breakfast in favour of lingering in the hides, we went straight from the forest to the Segama River, where we went on a 3 hour boat cruise in search of Irrawaddy Dolphins. Despite our efforts, this proved unsuccessful and we returned with little to show for it, though we did have great views of a **Large Flying Fox** as it flushed from the Nipah palm forest and flew over us.

I headed back to the road in the afternoon, checking each of the hides. As well as excellent birding, there was a surprising amount of mammal activity in the evening, with sightings of **Large Treeshrew**, **Lesser Mousedeer** and **Plantain Squirrels**. A short wait by a small river in the forest produced an **Asian Small-clawed Otter**, swimming



under the opposite bank before diving and disappearing from view. After a quick dinner break, I returned to the forest for a night walk, seeing **Greater Mousedeer** and **Malay Civet** in addition to some of the aforementioned species.

**19/07/25:** My penultimate day in Borneo was my last opportunity to find any of the lodge's specialities I had so far missed, and as such was focused on the bird hides. Waiting for several hours in the Bornean ground cuckoo hide, we saw another **Lesser Mousedeer** and a **Large Treeshrew**, which proved to be much bolder here than in the forest. Leaving the hide, a **Least Pygmy Squirrel** appeared in the top of a tree, giving us brief views before it vanished into the canopy. A final walk down the access road turned up a troop of **Southern Long-tailed Macaques** and a **Plantain Squirrel**, but the midday heat eventually forced me back to the lodge to wait out the rest of my time in Utan. After lunch, we once again boarded the bus and began the 5 hour transfer to Sandakan, where I went on a completely futile night walk behind the hotel.



**Above:** Large Treeshrew, Least Pygmy Squirrel

**20/07/25:** With our trip drawing to a close, I convinced my dad to drop me off at the RDC for a final birding session before our flight in the early afternoon. Arriving at the centre at sunrise, I entered the park without trouble, having simply told the security guard that I would buy my ticket on the way out. While my main focus here was on birds, a few hours on the trails produced **North Bornean Gibbon**, **Southern Pig-tailed Macaque**, **Prevost's** and **Pale Giant Squirrel** and a **Lesser Treeshrew**, which I found in the midst of a flock of bulbuls, presumably following the treeshrew for the insects disturbed by it (or vice versa). Returning to the hotel, I scrambled my belongings and made it to the lobby where the others were waiting, and we soon departed for our flight.

---

This trip was undoubtedly the best trip I've been on, in terms of both quality and quantity, for mammals and wildlife in general. I succeeded in finding almost all of my targets, with the exception of the Bornean subspecies of Asian Elephant, for which 3 species of microbat were a worthy compromise! Apart from the elephants, there were only a few notable misses. In particular, during the whole stay in Borneo we failed to see a single Bearded Pig, despite their abundance in the pre-swine flu days. However, our guide at Utan assured us that the species is making a comeback, and that its return was, indeed, responsible for the ground cuckoos becoming much less reliable. Additionally, I narrowly dipped on a troop of Sabah Grey Langurs, but given their scarcity in the coastal areas it seems that the record just before my arrival at Utan was sheer luck. In total, I observed 39 species of mammal, with 9 in peninsula Malaysia and 32 in Borneo. Additionally, I saw a total of 202 bird species, including a remarkable 143 lifers.

As for the locations themselves, most have been extensively covered in other trip reports so I have refrained from going into much detail about them. The one exception to this is Utan. This new lodge is a collection of modern rooms within 3 lodge buildings on the edge of an oil palm plantation, surrounded by secondary forest. Nonetheless, it proved to be an excellent destination for mammals, with 20 species seen during a 2 night stay including most of the Tabin specialities. On top of this, a herd of elephants was present around the lodge the month prior to my visit, our guide had seen 'several clouded leopards' since it opened in 2023, both flat-headed cats and otter civets are regular, and another birder saw a group of Sabah Grey Langurs mere hours before my arrival. However, as with other BET lodges there are a number of idiosyncratic rules of great nuisance to mammalwatchers: the lodge prohibits access to the trails without a guide, but there is no way of hiring a personal guide here (guides are allocated to groups, and those are based on the tour package rather than who is travelling). At this stage it is easy to disregard the rule and use the trails anyway, as there is no security beyond the lodge, but if it is enforced more strictly the mammalwatching potential of this site could be crippled.

-----

HO = Heard Only

L = Lifer

Count	Species	Location
-------	---------	----------

105	Long-tailed Macaque	Batu Caves, Fraser Hill, Sepilok, Kinabatangan, Sungai Kapur, roadsides
61	Southern Pig-tailed Macaque (L)	Fraser Hill, Sepilok, Kinabatangan, Sungai Kapur, roadsides

2	Southeast Asian Palm Civet (L)	KLCC Park
4	Southern Grey Bellied Squirrel (L)	KLCC Park, Fraser Hill
2	Asian Red-cheeked Squirrel (L)	Fraser Hill
8	Himalayan Striped Squirrel (L)	Fraser Hill
4	White-thighed Surili (L)	Fraser Hill
1	Siamang (L, HO)	Fraser Hill
1	Common Treeshrew (L)	Batu Caves

1	Marbled Cat (L)	Sungai Kapur
1	Sunda Leopard Cat (L)	Sungai Kapur
1	Asian Small-clawed Otter (L)	Sungai Kapur
2	Small-toothed Palm Civet (L)	Kinabatangan
4	Philippine Palm Civet (L)	Kinabatangan, Sungai Kapur
1	Malay Civet (L)	Sungai Kapur
1	Sunda Stink Badger (L)	Sungai Kapur
16	Plantain Squirrel	Sandakan, Kinabatangan, Sungai Kapur, Sepilok
11	Prevost's Squirrel (L)	Sandakan, Kinabatangan, Sungai Kapur, Sepilok
1	Horse-tailed Squirrel (L)	Sungai Kapur
2	Low's Squirrel (L)	Kinabatangan
1	Least Pygmy Squirrel (L)	Sungai Kapur
1	Red Giant Flying Squirrel (L)	Sepilok

5	Pale Giant Squirrel (L)	Kinabatangan, Sepilok
3	Asian House Rat (L)	Selingan Island (Sungai Kapur?)
2	Large Treeshrew (L)	Sungai Kapur
1	Lesser Treeshrew (L)	Sepilok
1	Philippine Slow Loris (L)	Kinabatangan
32	Silvery Langur (L)	Kinabatangan
6	Maroon Langur (L)	Gomantong Caves
62	Proboscis Monkey (L)	Kinabatangan, Sungai Kapur
6	North Bornean Gibbon (L)	Sungai Kapur, Sepilok
2	Bornean Orangutan (L)	Gomantong Caves, Sungai Kapur
3	Variable Flying Fox (L)	Selingan Island
5	Large Flying Fox (L)	Sungai Kapur
X	Wrinkle-lipped Bat (L)	Gomantong Caves
X	Fawn Roundleaf Bat (L)	Gomantong Caves
X	Creagh's Horseshoe Bat (L)	Gomantong Caves
3	Lesser Mousedeer (L)	Sungai Kapur
1	Greater Mousedeer (L)	Sungai Kapur