

Kuala Lumpur 2024/25: Bustling mammal life in the city!

In winter 2024, me and my now-fiancée Katya (Ekaterina) Sichinava finally were free of exams and studies and began planning our first big wildlife trip in SE Asia, since we had a whole month on our hands. Borneo came to mind first but turned out to be off-limits (because money), so we opted for a trip to Sri Lanka instead. However, due to the flights to Sri Lanka being way cheaper after the first week of New Year, and the desire to celebrate New Year together in civilisation before going for the real adventure, we decided to spend some nights in Kuala Lumpur before hopping over to the island. We did not travel out of the town much and took a pretty chill approach to mammal watching (since we also enjoy birds, herps and inverts – scoff all you want, they are cool!). However, we managed to see 11 species of mammals between Dec 29th and Jan 4th, mostly without leaving the city, so the report might be interesting for those with limited time in KL. Without further ado – onto the mammals!

Dec. 29th

The first mammal excitement came, when we, while walking to a restaurant, accidentally swerved on a narrow street with some trees and fences. Suddenly,

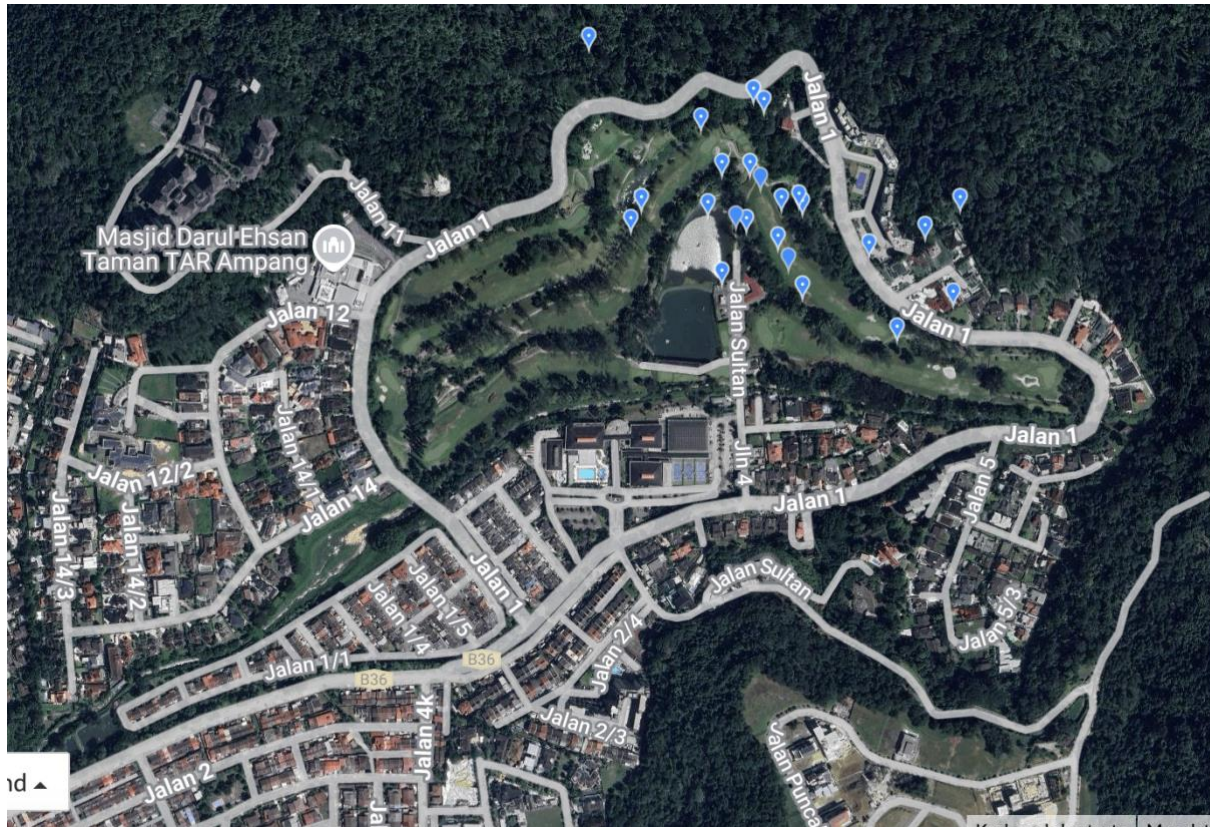
there was a large cat-like animal striding effortlessly atop a fence, inside the coils of barbed wire! This was an **Asian Palm Civet** – (*Paradoxurus hermaphroditus*)! There has been a recent debatable split, and the southern animals are now referred to as *P. musanga*, while *P. hermaphroditus* is reserved for ones in the north. However, I'll refer to these ones as *P. hermaphroditus*, until further studies are out. In any case, it was a majestic and gracious animal – and a lifer for both me and Katya! We managed to photograph it later, too, but I'll get to that. We also saw a cool *Argiope* spider, some Flat-Tailed House Geckos and our first bird lifers in a form of Javan Mynas and Pacific Swallows.

Dec. 30th

Early in the morning, we set out to explore an area that you can see on the map below. Even though it has several apartment courses and a golf course nearby, it also borders a large chunk of forest, and has tons of great birds, and some mammals, too! Upon arrival, we were immediately met with our second lifer of the trip – a **Common Threeshrew** (*Tupaia glis*) scurrying around on an asphalted trail! This creature, that looks like a cross between a red squirrel and a shrew, made several passes back and forth between the sides of the trail. Once it even carried a large fruit in its mouth before disappearing into the undergrowth! Needless to say, we were extremely happy to get another lifer so soon!



Common Threeshrew

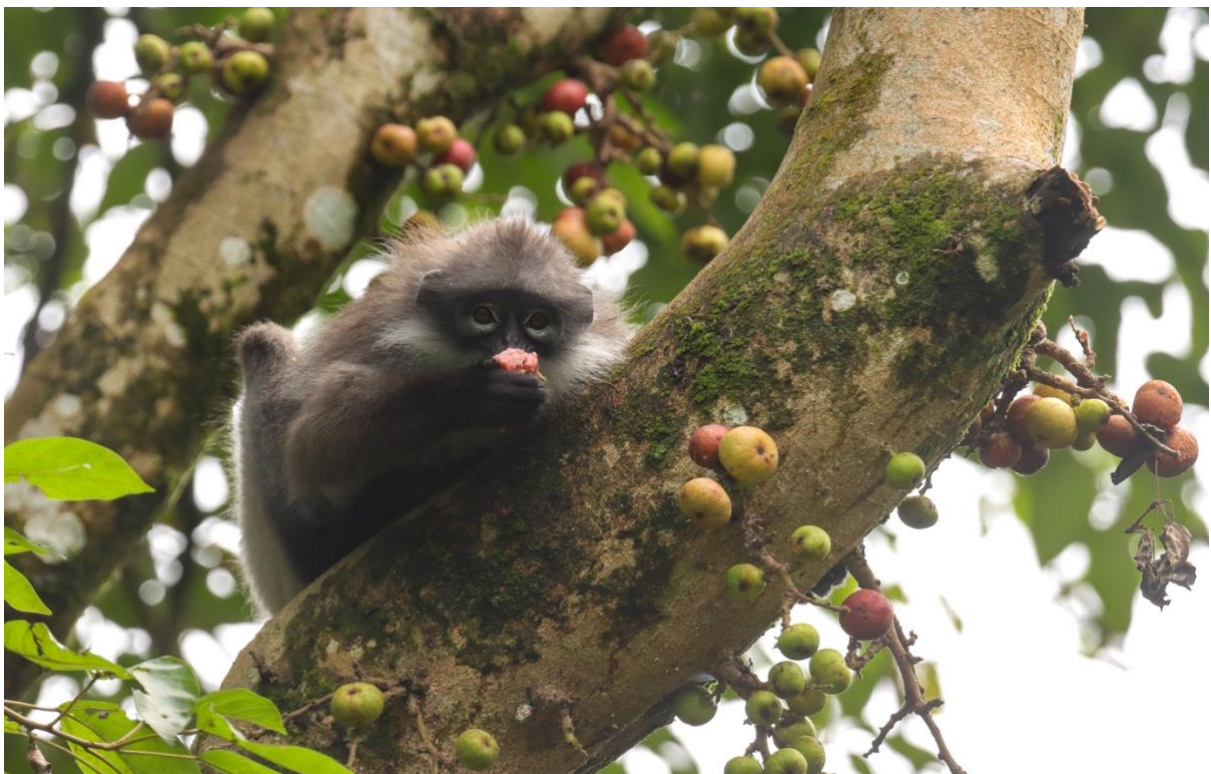


While we were busy watching birds, we also spotted another lifer mammal, - a pretty **Plantain Squirrel** (*Callosciurus notatus*) and a trip tick – some **Long-Tailed Macaques** (*Macaca fascicularis*), which were busy exploring a dead tree. However, we were after another type of primate...



Plantain Squirrel

And they appeared! A troop of endangered **Dusky Leaf Monkeys** (*Trachypithecus obscurus*), including an orange-coated baby! They were skulky and the views were a bit suboptimal, as they were positioned against the light, but still, incredible to see them as they fed on leaves! And they were followed by a **White-thighed Surili** (*Presbytis siamensis*)! First sighting was close, but obscured by leaves – however, we had a crackling view of one later on, gorging itself on figs from a *Ficus* tree! Another lifer and a stunning way to end the trip, escaping to the hotel from the afternoon heat.



Dusky Leaf Monkeys (above) and White-thighed Surili (below)

And sorry, guys, but I cannot continue without mentioning the birds. I'll leave a link to the full eBird report, but highlights included Gold-Whiskered Barbet, and Spectacled Spiderhunter. Also, look at that Golden-Spotted Tiger Beetle – what a stunner!



Gold-Whiskered Barbet (above) and Golden-spotted Tiger Beetle (below)

At night, we had scheduled a trip to Semenyih area with a world-famous herping guide and macro photographer Kurt Orion. For some reason, we failed to locate any snakes, but saw a wide array of insects, lizards and beautiful frogs instead! The undoubted highlights were two species of Flying Frog – Wallace's and Norhayati's Flying Frogs! These critters look like a live-action Kermit the Frog and are able to actually glide from tree to tree using their webbed feet! A must-see for any herpetofauna enthusiast. Also, we found a wide selection of sleeping birds, including a Dwarf Rufous-Backed Kingfisher, a Little Spiderhunter, and, best of all, amazingly beautiful Western Hooded Pitta!



Western Hooded Pitta



Tympanophyllum maculiventris



Norhayati's Flying Frog



Bell's Anglehead Lizard



Norhayati's Flying Frog

Dec. 31th

We were exhausted after the late night's herping, so woke up late today and went to the same area just in case. There was not much of note because of the afternoon heat, but we added some new birds (coolest was probably Gray-Rumped Treeswift) and, importantly another lifer mammal – juvenile **Southern Pig-Tailed Macaque** (*Macaca nemestrina*)! Later, near a small pond in town, we found our first Water Monitor (*Varanus salvator*), a Striated Heron, and one more lifer mammal - **Southern Gray-bellied Squirrel** (*Callosciurus concolor*). Not the most exciting lifer ever, to be honest... Rest of the day/night was spent celebrating New Year together.



Southern Pig-Tailed Macaque

Jan. 1st

The day was spent mostly wallowing in bed and battling the hangover, but we tried to go to the KLLC park for langurs and short-nosed fruit bats.

Unfortunately, it was closed! However, we still had some action at night – that day, we went to the park beneath Petronas Towers to look for the Civets again! It was hard to believe, that a small park with lawns held anything apart from unidentified microbats, but... With the help of my thermal, we quickly were onto a **Palm Civet** again! It hid high up in a tree but eventually came down and went for a stroll! What a thrill! Yeah, this is a common species throughout much of Asia, but it was still an amazing sighting for us newbies!



Southeast Asian Palm Civet

Jan. 2nd

On that day, we visited the botanical garden of Forest Research Institute Malaysia (FRIM) and booked a skywalk tour. I had to battle my fear of heights throughout the whole thing, and there was not as much life as I expected, but we did get two very cool lifers – one mammal, one bird. Firstly, I noticed a **Black Giant Squirrel** (*Ratufa bicolor*), which quickly took a rather suicidal-looking leap of faith and disappeared in the branches below. Bad sighting, but an awesome animal!



Black Giant Squirrel

Right after that, I noticed some movement among the canopy, which turned out to be a flock of Blue-crowned

Hanging-Parrots! This species is not too common in reports from KL, and it was a great joy to watch these acrobatic birds hanging upside-down - like Christmas tree ornaments that came to life.



Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrots

After that, we took a walk around the gardens, enjoying Clouded and Water Monitors, Orange-Breasted Flowerpeckers, a very obliging Orange-Bellied Leafbird feeding on nectar, exceptionally cute Black-thighed Falconets, one of which was devouring a bug... The most unexpected sighting was probably a Giant Snakehead with young around it, rising from the pond like a mythical sea serpent!



Black-thighed Falconet



Clouded Monitor



Giant Snakehead



Orange-Bellied Leafbird

On the same day we took a car to Kuala Selangor, stopping at Bukit Malawati on the way to tick another lifer - **Selangor Silvered Langur** (*Trachypithecus selangorensis*). Tourists feed them with greenery that is sold nearby, and there's a lot of these charismatic monkeys around, so you should have no problem seeing them.



Selangor Silvered Langur



Selangor Silvered Langur

However, the main thing that drove us to Selangor was the fireflies. At night, the mangroves light up with an astounding display of glowing insect butts, and every mangrove starts to look like it has been wrapped in Christmas lights! As if this wasn't enough, you can also see bioluminescent plankton in the water, glowing bright blue. And here the thing, which was more important, than any lifer – I proposed to my love Katya under the firefly-adorned trees, and she said “yes”! From now on I should refer to her as fiancée in my reports (shoutout to Alex Meyer, who always corrected me on the Azores trip, when I referred to her as “girlfriend”).

Jan. 4th

We decided to rest on Jan 3rd, since we both caught a cold two days before (thanks to the air conditioners turning every car and cafe into a frozen hell). However, on day 4 we visited National Botanic Garden Shan Alam. It was full of noisy people, but we did rack up our bird count a bit higher with species like Raffles' Malkoha, White-Headed Munia and some others. Here we also have the final, most boring and plain-looking lifer of the trip – **Lowland Sunda Squirrel** (*Sundasciurus tenuis*). After that, an evening visit to Bukit Kiara failed to produce anything of note, apart from a distant Banded Woodpecker.



Sunda Lowland Squirrel



Raffles' Malkoha



***Tapirus indicus* ssp. *resinus* outside the Shan Alam Botanic Garden**

Resume.

We departed for Sri Lanka the next day, but I'll cover that in a separate report. Still, it was an exciting time in KL, and with a bit more effort and time we could have seen more species, such as the iconic Otters and Short-nosed fruit bats. If you have a bit of time on your hands, you can add a bit of interesting mammals to your life list! And other species, if you are a naturalist and not just a mammal watcher.

Full mammal list, lifers in bold

Common name	Latin name	Location
SE Asian Palm Civet	<i>Paradoxurus musanga</i>	Random street; park near Petronas Towers
Common Threshrew	<i>Tupaia glis</i>	“Jalan 1” area, see map above
Long-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca fascicularis</i>	Everywhere, incl. Jalang 1, Bukit Kiara and Bukit Malawati
Southern Pig-Tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>	Jalang 1
Dusky Leaf Monkey	<i>Trachypithecus obscurus</i>	Jalang 1

White-thighed Surili	<i>Presbytis siamensis</i>	Jalang 1
Selangor Silvered Langur	<i>Trachypithecus selangorensis</i>	Bukit Malawati
Black Giant Squirrel	<i>Ratufa bicolor</i>	FRIM
Plantain Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus notatus</i>	Jalang 1 and most parks in the city
Southern Gray-bellied Squirrel	<i>Callosciurus concolor</i>	Taman Botani Negara Shan Alam and every other park in the city
Sunda Lowland Squirrel	<i>Sundasciurus tenuis</i>	Taman Botani Negara Shan Alam

The full bird list can be found [here](#).