

Trip Report, Northern Sulawesi and Singapore, October 2025.



After spending almost three weeks on a trip in southern and central Sulawesi with Carlos Bocos, Jon Hall and others, I decided to try to visit some spots in the north end of the island which I had not previously visited before heading home. Carlos had connected me with Irfan, a friend of his who had worked as a ranger and was willing to guide me to try to see Gorontalo Macaque. I arrived in Gorontalo after a milk run of flights via Makassar and Jakarta.

I shared a taxi from the airport with a young chap who spoke English, who translated my request to phone Irfan and arrange a place to meet. We dropped off my bag at Yulia Hotel and then drove to Tulabolo, a 30 km drive from Gorontalo. We didn't arrive until about 10:30 am, which made me a bit

skeptical of our chances of seeing the macaques, but Irfan appeared confident. After crossing a small river on a tiny ferry, we rode a motorcycle the last 3 km or so to the park entrance and started up a trail. Within less than half an hour we came across a troop of skittish Gorontalo Macaques, followed by several sightings of Sulawesi Pygmy Squirrels and a range of birdlife. The rain started in earnest in the early afternoon, so Irfan cut us a couple of giant palm fronds to use as umbrellas. Unfortunately, the trails were starting to turn into rivulets and then streams, so we took shelter at a ranger station to wait it out and then, after an hour or so, we gave up and started heading back to the park entrance, seeing more macaques and squirrels along the way. The driver from the morning was waiting and we drove back to Gorontalo for pizza and an early night.



The express bus to Manado was scheduled to depart at 6:00 am, but thanks to the efficiency of the “Grab” driver, I was at the station just after 5:00. This turned out to be lucky, as the bus actually departed at 5:28 am, and there wasn’t another one for many hours. A chain-smoking Filipino fisherman interrogated me for the first few hours until I feigned sleep. We arrived in Manado at 3:15 and I hopped on a minivan to the Padua station, from which buses run to Bitung. The bus arrived there just before 6:00 and I then realized that Bitung is not actually very close to Tangkoko. I grabbed a taxi, but the driver, who appeared to be about 11, and I had difficulty understanding each other, so I hopped out and enlisted the aid of an English-speaking passerby to help me find another ride. This accomplished, I made it to Tangkoko Lodge just after 7:00 and was welcomed with a delicious meal and a chat with Bobby Lambaihang, who had guided me in Nantu Forest in early June of 2023. Of interest, Bobby told me that, after we had seen multiple babirusa in Nantu, he had been back there a few weeks later with a client, but they had not seen any babirusa, and he wasn’t aware of anyone else having seen one there since. A sobering reminder of the devastation wrought by Swine Flu amongst wild pig populations.

Jimmy, a guide and colleague of Bobby’s, and I walked to the park entrance the next morning. We quickly saw two troops of Celebes Black Crested Macaques, several White-eared Pygmy Squirrels, a total of five Bear Cuscus, two fruit bats in a hollow tree and a horseshoe bat in a fallen hollow tree, just in front of a Reticulated Python guarding her eggs deeper in the hollow. By 11:00 it was starting to rain and I headed back to the lodge for lunch. I returned to the park at 4:30 and found a troop of macaques already settling down for the night. I then walked back up the road past Tangkoko Lodge and turned up a track between a forest patch and a coconut plantation. I saw an unusual animal on a palm which, on closer inspection, turned out to be a Sugar Glider, originally imported from Australia and now a pest on the island. After dinner, Bobby was guiding a couple of birders in the park and invited me to join them. We found a large terrestrial grey rat with a white belly and a terminal tail tuft, several Pallas’s Tube-nosed Bats (*Nyctimene cephalotes*), Sulawesi Naked-backed Fruit Bats, Northeastern Xanthurus Rat, additional bats and a small arboreal mouse. I left about 10:00 pm, well satisfied with the evening’s results, especially given that the birders had seen very little.















The next morning's hike was fairly unproductive. I went out in the afternoon with a new guide, Roy, and French guest from the lodge, Andre. Prior to nightfall we saw the usual suspects – Black Crested Macaques, Whitish Dwarf Squirrels, Sulawesi Dwarf Squirrels and Bear Cuscus. Just before dark we went to a large Ficus tree and found three adult Gursky's Spectral Tarsiers and an infant, then went to another known roost tree where three tarsiers had just emerged. Walking the trail back after dark revealed another terrestrial rat (awaiting identification), Sulawesi Naked-backed Fruit Bats, Lesser False Vampire Bats in a hollow tree, more Pallas's Tube-nosed Bats, Hellwald's Sulawesi Spiny Rat, two Northeastern Xanthurus Rats in a tree and additional unidentified bats.







I had a relatively leisurely morning the next day, then checked out just after lunch and headed to the airport for a flight to Singapore, arriving a bit late at 10:00 pm. In Singapore I was hoping to find a Sunda Pangolin following some tips I had received. I took an Uber to Lower Pierce Reservoir and walked along Old Upper Thomson Road, seeing one *Maxomys* but little else initially. Eventually I came across several Sunda Colugos, some Long-tailed Macaques in a tree, and later, three individual Lesser Mousedeer in various spots in the forest beside the road. It started to rain hard, so I headed back to the airport about 3:00 am, only to discover that Jon had seen a Sunda Pangolin that very night in Java. Wildlife watching can be so cruel.

A big thank you to Irfan, Bobby, Jimmy and Roy for their guiding and company. The few days in northern Sulawesi provided a great end to a spectacular trip, with some new mammals and also a bit of relaxation. Bobby's Tangkoko Lodge, as well as being very comfortable, is conveniently located just beside the entrance to Tangkoko Park, and makes a good base for explorations in that area. Sulawesi as a whole wildly exceeded expectations and really does deserve more attention from wildlife enthusiasts.

Ian Thompson, Victoria, BC

List of mammal species seen, Northern Sulawesi:

1. Sugar Glider – *Petaurus breviceps* (introduced)
2. Gursky's Spectral Tarsier – *Tarsius spectrumgurskyae*
3. Gorontalo Macaque – *Macaca nigrescens*
4. Celebes/Crested Black Macaque – *Macaca nigra*
5. Sulawesi Dwarf Squirrel – *Prosciurillus murinus*
6. White-eared/Whitish Dwarf Squirrel – *Prosciurillus leucomus*
7. Hellwald's Sulawesi Spiny Rat/Maxomys – *Maxomys hellwaldii*
8. Northeastern Xanthurus Rat - *Rattus xanthurus*
9. Sulawesi Fruit Bat/Sulawesi Rousette – *Pilonycteris celebensis*
10. Sulawesi Naked-backed Fruit Bat – *Dobsonia exoleta*
11. Swift Fruit Bat – *Thoopterus nigrescens*
12. Pallas's Tube-nosed Bat - *Nyctimene cephalotes*
13. Lesser False Vampire Bat – *Megaderma spasma*
14. Sulawesi Horseshoe Bat – *Rhinolophus celebensis*

List of mammal species seen, Singapore:

15. Sunda Colugo – *Galeopterus variegatus*
16. Long-tailed Macaque – *Macaca fascicularis*
17. Rajah/Brown Spiny Rat – *Maxomys rajah*
18. Lesser Mousedeer – *Tragulus kanchil*