

Danau Sentarum, Kalimantan – Indonesia Oct 2023 /Dec 2025

A fashionably late report about Danau Sentarum national park targeting Borneo's most glorious primate, *Presbytis chrysomelas cruciger*. This report will cover two separate trips, as I decided to wait until I got the sightings I wanted before writing a report. The park is remote and it is a bit of a journey to get there, so I figured it is better to have some decent and more replicable sightings before writing a report.

Danau Sentarum is a massive floodplain with about 20 seasonal lakes, which makes the timing rather important if you are planning to go. It is home to a subspecies of the Bornean banded langur which goes by tricolor langur or locally lutung Sentarum. The langur just featured on the Top 25 Primates in Peril list... so topical too.

This trip was a long time in the planning, originally planned pre-covid and was initially rather challenging to get info on. The national park was unhelpful at best. Eventually I got in touch with Erwanto who lives in Semangit village which is close to Bukit Semujan, the mount/hill where the langurs live.

The first trip was in November 2023 and I had about five days to look for the langurs and then another three days in a different part of West Kalimantan looking for herps. I flew Jakarta to Putussibau via Pontianak. Erwanto had arranged a driver to pick me up at the airport and drive the 2 or 3 hours to Lanjak where he would meet me on his boat. The importance of timing quickly became apparent as the village at the edge of the lake where I was supposed to board Erwanto's boat was not as close to the edge of the lake as planned. It turned out the water was low, very low, and a 45-minute motorbike ride along the dried-up lake bed was needed to get to a dribble of winding water that Erwanto had somehow managed to navigate.



This was supposed to be underwater

What was supposed to be a one-hour boat ride from Lanjak to Semangit turned into a rather painstaking four-hour winding crawl through the dried waterways. Erwanto's ability to navigate the shallow water and endless obstacles even in the dark was pretty impressive. By the time we

arrived it was considerably later than expected and so we would wait until the following morning to enter the forest.



Chief Navigator - Erwanto

The next morning, we woke up early and realized the thirty-minute boat ride straight to langur central was no longer on the table and would be replaced with another winding 90-minute crawl through the waterways and a bonus 2-hour hike to get to the habitat. Me and Erwanto were joined by Erwin who also stays in Semangit, and a on a couple of days Ramli joined too. The lake is absolutely amazing and it is rather bizarre to be walking through the corridors of weird alieny plants that are supposed to be at the bottom of the lake. The moment you see Bukit Semujan come looming out the mist is pretty breathtaking. Stork billed kingfishers are pretty much everywhere along the waterways and Asian water monitors were commonly seen fishing in the pools left behind by the retreating lake.



Walking on the bottom of the lake

Interesting foot prints were seen in the mud leading from the langur habitat to the edge of the lake. Fresh footprints were seen every morning. They were pretty big and I don't know what they could be other than clouded leopard but would love to hear what other more footprint savvy people think.



Due to the lack of water, our original destination on the far slope of Bukit Semujan had to be abandoned and we had to try a different closer location on the near side of Semujan. This was something of a blow as the place where the langurs had been encountered most regularly was now inaccessible.



On this side there was a small rubber plantation right at the foot of the mountain where Erwanto had seen the langurs previously. They are particularly fond of the fruit of the rubber

trees and sometimes come down the mountain to feed. There were a couple of other larger fruiting trees a little higher up the mountain that Erwanto knew the langurs liked and also used as a corridor to get down to the rubber.

The rubber trees were langurless in the morning so we went up the foot of Semujan a bit to check out the larger trees but they didn't appear to have much fruit. We decided to stake them out regardless of the lack of fruit as it seemed the langurs were still up the mountain and might pass this way if they were to come down. The langurs didn't come in the morning so we waited in the forest until afternoon when the langurs might be active and on the search for food again. Bukit Semjuan was hot. Very hot. I think anyone who has spent time in Kalimantan is familiar with the heat and mosquitoes. But this was extreme even for Kalimantan. On the bright side no leeches though.

The trees were very quiet. Only the occasional squirrel disturbing the silence. We moved back and forth between the fruiting trees at the foot and the rubber lower down until it went dark, but nothing showed. We were planning some herping down a small river but after a full day of slowly (or quickly in my case) boiling and being mosquito chum, we decided to hike back to boat and return to the village for food and rest.



Downtown Semangit with low water

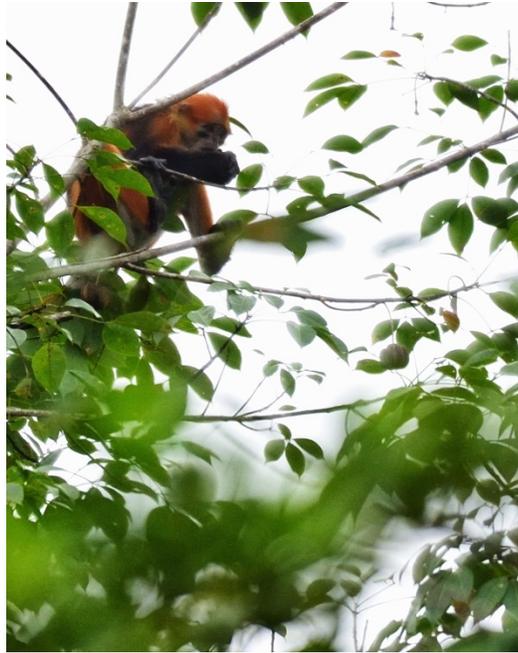
The next morning was wet and delayed our plan to get out even earlier. We figured with the extreme heat the langurs might be active even earlier than usual and their window of activity even shorter. By 9 am the heat was pretty intense. The day followed a similar pattern to the last although we did have the first very distant langur sounds in the middle of the day. I think this just served to mock out theory of them not being as active in the heat of the day. The sounds were not from up the mountain as expected but far off behind some impassable terrain over behind the rubber trees. As usual detailed langur planning was going down the drain due to langurs doing whatever they want whenever they want. Some quality hammock broiling time

and inspection of the variety of cool insects that came to sample the pooling sweat were the main activities for the day.

A wonderfully timed storm rolled in to curtail the chances of any multicolor-langur-action in the afternoon potential period of activity and ensured we had our own private pool in the bottom of the boat to cool down in. One thing to look out for in this season when the water is low is there a whole lot of kind of addled fish seemingly on the verge of death in the low water that suddenly see your torch light over the side of the boat and get one last surge of energy to leap into the bright light. You get hit by a quite a few fish. Not massive ones, but definitely with enough thwack to prefer them not to be doing it. One total jester managed to wedge himself under a part of the floor we couldn't see and was responsible for a pretty ripe smell after a couple of days of secretive baking.



Day three we got out fairly early despite some drizzle and heavy cloud. We were planning to go higher up the mountain today even though the chances were pretty slim up there due to the terrain and the density of the canopy. We were just entering the rubber trees when Erwin said there was something in the trees up ahead and I should go first. There was something in the trees and it was cruciger. He was stuffing his face half-obscured by branches and some thick early morning mist. I rattled off a few photos not expecting much and not getting much but did get to see the rather shockingly orange and contrasting black. Although, I didn't get to see any of the white to make up the three colors that give them their name. I think he stayed about 10 seconds before another langur, even further away and higher up, spotted me and started the alarm call. The trees around were briefly alive with crashing and then they were gone. There must have been around 8 or 9 individuals in the group but only two gave fleeting glances.



Presbytis chrysomelas cruiger in the mist

Thrilled to have seen them even if not optimum sightings, we decided to hunker down and stake out the rubber trees. We figured they would be back because we had seen there was a lack of fruit in their other usual haunts. They did not come back. They just circled around for a couple of hours, calling out of sight, before racing past the spot where Erwanto and Erwin were hiding out of sight back in the trees the way we had come.

We went up the mountain a bit after that and found it to be as advertised, steep and with vegetation and canopy so thick there was zero chance of seeing anything let alone a rather skittish langur.

More hammock action and a pretty cool sighting of a rough-necked monitor bustling through the undergrowth not so far away. It is always cool to see any monitor that isn't salvator so that was appreciated. We tried in the afternoon to go in the direction the langurs had disappeared in the morning and although they never showed the scenery alongside the edge of the lake was stunning as the sun set. Some big eagles plucking the stranded fish out of tiny puddles were having a field day.

It turned out day four would be our final day. Day five would have to be fully committed to returning to Putussibau due to the lack of water and extra boat time. Day four followed a similar pattern to the previous days with no langur action. We did spend more time exploring what was left of some small rivers looking for herps at night and saw some cool stuff but on the mammal front just some rodents I did not photo or identify.

Getting back on the boat that night was mixed emotions. Very happy to have finally seen cruciger but also knowing I would be back to see him how I imagined and get better views.

Erwanto has a homestay that is comfortable where you can charge stuff and take a wash. His wife cooks great food, a mixture of fish, rice, and chicken or vegetables.



Battling the raging white water - The trees in the background were supposed to be underwater

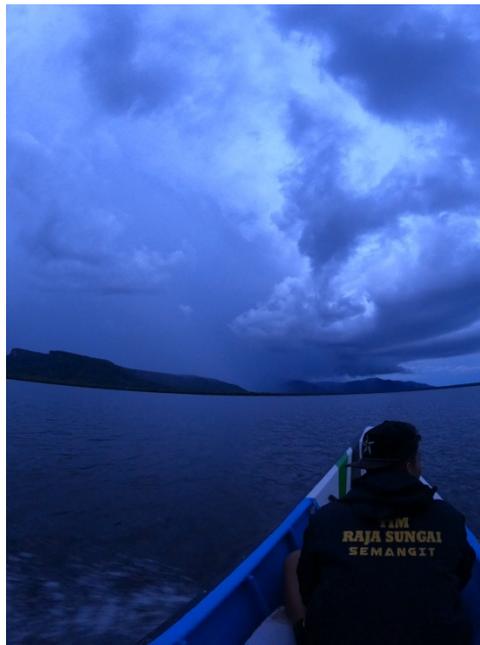
Just a quick note about the three days after this. I went to a different location in West Kalimantan doing some herping. Mammal sightings were minimal, a lot of rats, and rats that had a penchant for jumping on you. The habitat was pretty narrow steep walled rivers that caused the rodents to panic and leap on you as a spring board when in the spot light. There was one later known as mega rat that was amusingly large that refused to move from the top of boulder pile we had to climb. We decided it was a good time to take a break and after a few minutes he skulked off into a hole. I don't want to give a depressing end to this part of the trip but we did bump into some hunters who were out looking for mammals. They had got a sun bear cub a few nights previous, which was sad to hear, but at least showed the forest wasn't completely dead. They were familiar with most animals you would expect in Kalimantan but did say the gibbons, which would have been abbott's, had disappeared years ago.

Erwanto is trying to set up some ecotourism for the langur and I said I would try my best to try to get some people to come, but I think it is a kinda hard sell to try and see them the way I did the first time. Quite a few people reached out to me about the primates in Mentawai and Tapanuli and went after I did those reports so I am hopeful someone will endure my ramblings and do the same again. So, we made another plan to try and see them again in better conditions and with better quality sightings that a non-masochist might enjoy.

Second time around we planned for a week; 4 days for the langur and three days in a different part of Sentarum for some herping and exploring some other potential mammaling action. This

time water level was good, fruiting was good, and we could get to the good part which had been accessible last time.

Erwin had moved to a different part of Sentarum so wouldn't be joining us for part two. Erwanto's son, Rian, and Uju Adeng joined the team for the re-languring. There is a small camp in the new location where we would be based for the next few days. There is a ten-minute walk from where the boat can go, to the camp. The camp is situated in the middle of a bunch of rubber trees at the foot of the mountain surrounded by good quality forest. However, unfortunately, the fruiting season in this part of the mountain was not aligned with the other side of the mountain because that's just the way it goes. So, conditions ended up not being as optimal as first thought but we were already here.



The first morning we went out after hearing the langurs calling from up the mountain. Uju adeng told me there was no point chasing those ones because they were too high and far so we went out in the opposite direction towards a huge petai tree that the langurs had a liking for. After about 45 minutes of hiking we heard some crashing and the tell-tale machine gun warning call, they had seen us before we had seen them. After about 30 minutes of cat and mouse creeping after them, I got my first glimpse of the langurs.

They were still very shy but definitely a lot easier to see here. We waited for a while to see if the lure of petai could get them back but after a couple of hours of only squirrel action we decided to try back the other direction where the calls had been in the morning. We saw a white-bellied rat snake crossing a stream on the way. We hiked up a distance and waited near another of their favorite trees. The langurs were calling infrequently but still from way up high. We called it for the day and went back to camp to eat and relax before going out for the night.

Night was quiet for mammals with heavy downpours and not much seen outside of frogs and lizards and some tree mice. Each night followed a similar pattern.

Day two we went early back to the tree we had checked last night and it wasn't long before the langurs were calling and from a lot closer than yesterday. We waited as they moved closer and closer, homing in on our tree. They eventually arrived and were in the tree directly over us. Obscured by thick canopy but right above us. It was one of them moments where you are trying to decide between just waiting for a moment for a window to present itself before they become aware of your presence and bolt, or you force it and try get a good position and get photos quick before they run. I waited a while and with them never coming into view I decided to slide down the hill a bit and try to find a shot. Yeah, I am sure you can guess how that went. An orange flash, alarm call explosion, and some sweet sweet branch where a langur had been a second ago photos to add my already impressive collection.

We went back over the other side and checked over there and disturbed a lone langur that had been surprisingly close. It disappeared fast and was gone for good despite our best efforts to track it down. We went back as it went dark and discussed plans for the next day. As we were coming back through the rubber trees we heard the langurs calling and some movement very high up in the trees. Seeing how high they were as it was already going dark, we figured they would be roosting there for the night and would come down early. We would go out early to catch them in the act. We went out early before 6am, but turned out they were earlier. They had been and gone, having eaten in the dark and left some nice chewed rubber husks for us. I think this was mainly due to the fact that langurs do whatever they want whenever they want.



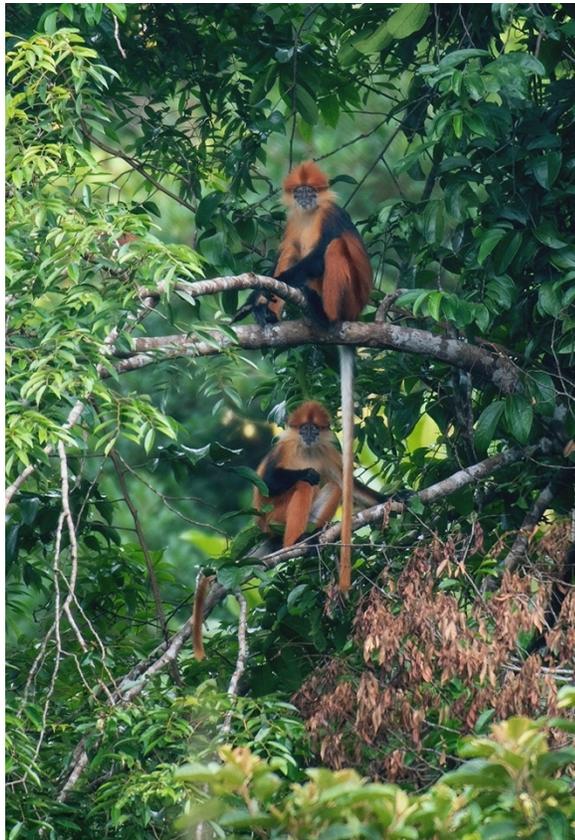
Cruciger whisperers - Rian and Uju Adeng

The rest of the morning was very quiet and we decided to go up the mountain if they weren't going to be coming down to us. There are three groups of langurs they know in the area. We

had encountered two of them but the mountain group were still missing in action so up we went. Going up the mountain is a battle and very beautiful but I wouldn't say it is highly recommended if you are looking for good langur sightings. The langurs were calling but it was pretty impenetrable. We waited near the calls then something came crashing through the canopy – a pig-tailed macaque... The langur calls faded quickly once the macaques showed up. I was told seeing pig-tailed is very rare here, much harder than cruciger, and it was cool to see legit wild jungle pig-taileds compared to the cocky side of the road kind, but I can't say I was thrilled to have them driving the langurs away. We slid, fell, collapsed our way back down the mountain and despite our best efforts no langurs showed. The guys had been telling me all along to chill and just wait at the camp - 'the langurs will come to us' I was assured. but I am not great at waiting especially when it comes to langurs. My experience waiting for langurs to rock up at the expected time and place is not littered with success.

Next morning Hendry who was staying at the camp and collecting honey, came and told me he had seen them out in the forest behind the rubber just behind the camp. And he was right, but just as we came around the corner in maximum stealth mode the langurs detected us and bolted. Back to camp feeling a bit down on the langur chances, always so close but so far, I decided what was needed was another hike up the mountain, sitting and waiting wouldn't work, langurs need to be earned in miles and mosquito bites.

We found an orangutan nest not far up the trail and within about 20 mins the langurs were calling loudly...from back down the mountain at the camp. I know anthropomorphizing is not the way to go but if there was ever mocking laughter from a monkey it was that. We legged it back down to the camp to find the langurs were not there. They were calling but still out of sight, which was bad, but also good as it meant my mountain dalliance hadn't cost us any fantastical views. We sat and waited and then the langur gods aligned and three langurs jumped out on a branch.



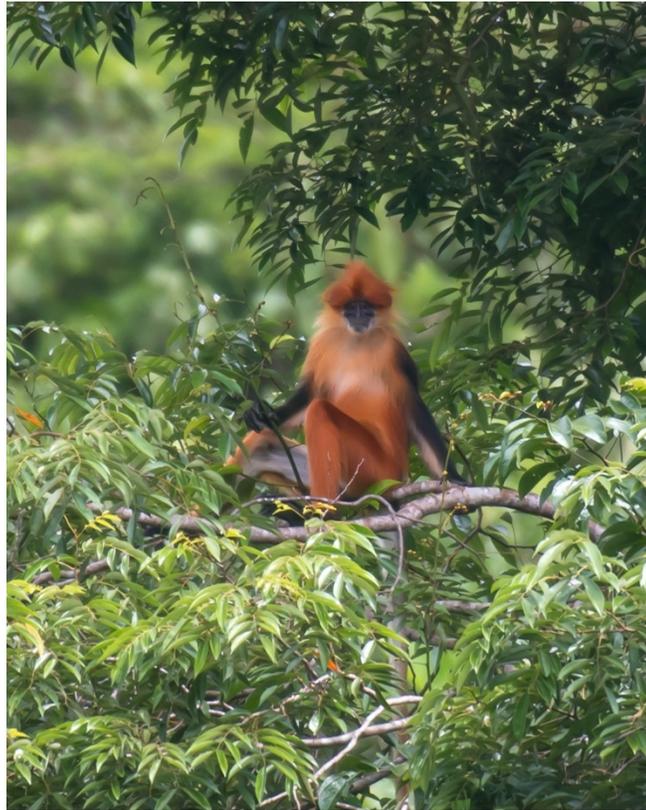
An adult male, an adult female, and a juvenile. They were behind a small lake right next to the camp so were not in ultimate self-preservation mode like all the others had been. They hung around for about 15 minutes rattling through a variety of poses and making sure to show off all three colors as requested. It was amazing and everyone in camp was buzzing we had finally got what we had set out to get.



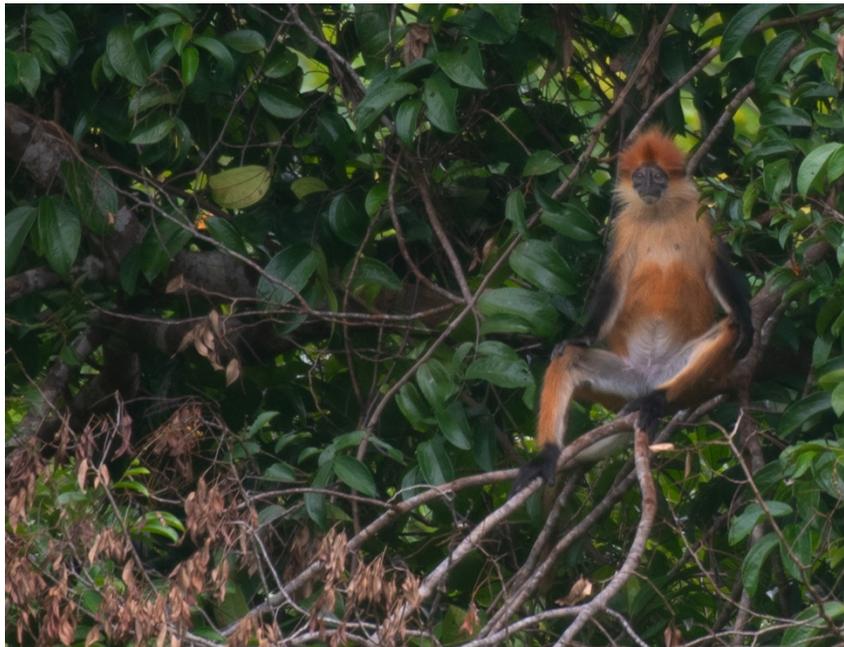
About an hour later they circled back round the lake and came to the tree right above the camp looking for rambutans. Apparently if there are rambutans fruiting they lose all their inhibitions and will happily troff the rambutans right in front of you at the bottom of the tree. There was only a solitary rambutan so they didn't hang around long but it was pretty funny to see how much power their favorite fruit had over them. That was the last we saw of them and we went back to Semangit the next day after quick early morning jaunt round the rubber trees.

The next three days we focused on nocturnal herps and I was joined by Renaldi and Ahmad who would help me on a reptile hunt. We had plans to go to other locations in the day, one place where orangutans are possible and another where abbott's gibbon is still around but the nights were rather intense and day time became just about rest. From asking around it seems *Presbytis frontata* is still around on at least one of hills in lake but that was pretty far and didn't fit with our nocturnal activities.

We saw mouse deer and colugos but didn't see much else arboreal as our efforts were focused on the ground and in rivers. A variety of different rodents were seen which I am sure other people would appreciate more than me. A couple of people in the village told me clouded leopard sightings are not uncommon in dry season in one part of the lake as the leopards come down to get the dying fish from the shallow water. No one was familiar with bay cat but they knew all the other cats. Proboscis monkeys can be seen in the trees behind Erwanto's house too but we didn't spend any time looking for them.



Just a quick note about the flies and mosquitoes. The biting stuff is pretty crazy even in comparison to the previous location, I guess the extra water must have some impact. There is some kind of midge there that is just another level that leaves you looking like something from a plague den. Bathe in mosquito spray.



Female cruciger

I know Erwanto is hoping to build something for the langurs so please do get in touch with him if you are interested. Contact him on +62 895 3279 00608 and if you need any extra info or anything please get in touch with me on Instagram markleonspence. If anyone is into herps or freshwater fish or orchids they have a bunch of cool stuff too. Erwanto, Erwin, Renaldi, Rian, Uju Adeng, and Ahmad were all amazing and were great fun to be with. Uju Adeng really knows the langur hotspots and behavior. They have a good understanding of the langurs movements and gave a million percent effort the whole time I was there. Before going definitely check the season for the water level, and the fruiting, and just listen and wait at the camp for the langurs to come to you.



Team Semangit



Downtown Semangit with water

