



My Big Cat Year – Visit to Borneo for the Sunda Clouded Leopard and the other Wildcats – 27/05/26 to 30/06/26

As part of **The Big Cat Year**, we made a visit to **Borneo**, booked through **1StopBorneo**, a Bornean eco-tourism operator who is also very active in conservation. You could also turn the two around, i.e. it is an NGO who uses the income from the eco-tourism side for the conservation efforts. **Shavez Cheema**, the founder of 1StopBorneo was instrumental in setting up the trip. Already from the beginning, he has been very supportive of My Big Cat Year. Again, many, many thanks Shavez!!

It was a **30-day trip** and focused originally mainly on **Brunei (4 days)** and Sabah (**24 days**). Prior to arriving in Brunei, I visited **Singapore (3 days)**, a place I have worked in back in 1993/94. In Sabah, we visited Beluran, Tawau Hills NP, Inikea, Plant4Borneoelephants, Maliau Basin, Deramakot and the Kinabatangan River.

All in all, we managed to see **56 mammal species**, around **140 bird species** and **28 Reptiles and Amphibians!**

With regard to the mammals, the highlights for me were **Borneo Bay Cat, Marbled Cat (3x, 4 ind.), Sunda Leopard Cat (43x), Sunda Pangolin (6x), Otter Civet (2x), Banded Civet (4x), Moonrat (5x), Sunda Stink Badger (9x), Binturong, Proboscis Monkey, Bornean Orangutan, Maroon Langur, BorneoElephant, Irrawady Dolphin, Hose's Pigmy Flying Squirrel, Hose's Shrew, Western Tarsier.**

Bird highlights for me were **Helmeted Hornbill, Bornean Crested Fireback, Red-legged Crake, Storm's Stork, Blyth's and Gould's Frogmouth, Barred Eagle Owl, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Bornean Bristlehead, Eastern Hooded Pitta, Black-and-yellow Broadbill.**

Reptile and Amphibian highlights for me were **Wagler's Pit Viper, Banded Malayan Coral Snake, Banded Krait, Banded Cat Snake, Saltwater Crocodile, Reticulated Python, Borneo Flying Frog, Dog-toothed Cat Snake, Wallace Flying Frog, Harlequin Tree Frog.**

Top 5 Mammals	Top 5 Birds	Top 5 Wildlife moments
Borneo Bay Cat	Helmeted Hornbill	A Borneo Bay Cat crossing the road
Marbled Cat	Borneo Bristlehead	Mating behaviour of a pair of Marbled Cats
Sunda Leopard Cat	Red-legged Crake	Sunda Leopard Cat taking a Rajah Spiny Rat
Sunda Pangolin	Storm's Stork	Reticulated Python devouring a Sambar
Otter Civet	Barred Eagle-Owl	Watching close to 80 Borneo Elephants

Please find hereafter the journals and pictures as shown in the Blogs in chronological order on the website www.mybigcatyear.com





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The Big Cat Year in Borneo kicked off well with a Sunda Pangolin and Sunda Leopard Cat!

Arriving from Mongolia, I had an intense two weeks in the **Netherlands**. A short visit with my daughter Robine to Stockholm to see my brother and his family, Bea had organized a day in Lochem for her birthday with her family, I had made appointments to see a lot of friends, attended a few events and spent as much time as possible to see Bea and our three kids. Great to be back and not yet looking forward to nearly 4 months of travelling. But I know that once I am on my way, it is okay, I relax and start looking forward to the next adventure.

So I left on the 27th of May to arrive the next day in **Singapore for a short visit of three days**. As I worked in Singapore in 1993/94, I always like to come back there and visit a few places which I enjoyed much in the nineties. Arriving in the morning, I quickly checked into the nice and affordable Lyf Bugis hotel in the centre of town. In the afternoon, I visited the old TNT office, the 9th floor in Parkway Parade and had a walk through the shopping centre there. Weird to be back there after more than 30 years. I also visited the house where we lived at Riviera Drive. At the time I shared the house with a lifelong and dear friend Gavin Maitland and also another ex-TNT colleague David Walsh. With David, I only stayed in contact through social media. The coming three days while in Singapore, I found out that David passed away earlier this year ... very sad ... as he was a great person and it must have been a great loss to all those people close to him.

Next day at sunrise, a visit was made to the **Singapore Botanical Gardens**, one of the best in



the world, an oasis of rest and peace in this busy city. In the afternoon, I went up to **Bukit Timah National Park**, a patch of true jungle close to town. I managed to observe a pair of **Wagler's Pit Vipers** which was nice. In the evening I met my old friend and ex-TNT

colleague, Mark Brimblecombe, at Noir, a nice outing that he runs together with his wife, at Gardens by the Bay. We had a great dinner, and it was good to catch up, thanks Mark, really good to meet up again after all those years!!!

Next destination was **Brunei**, where I arrived on the 31st of May and was greeted by **Shavez Cheema, the founder of [1stopBorneo](#)**. He is one of the persons who inspired me a lot with the way he approaches eco-tourism and how he connects this to conservation. From the start of My Big Cat Year, he has been one of my greatest fans as he noticed immediately the potential impact of My Big Cat Year. It was great to finally meet up in person.





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Upon arrival, we went to have Coffee with Professor Ulmar Grafe, a person who has worked over 20 years in Brunei and has done a lot of scientific research towards different animals in Brunei. What a nice person to meet and we had a nice talk about different kinds of topics related to Nature and Conservation. Also present was Aslan, a guide who lives in the Labi area and the coming four nights we would stay at his home and family. Shavez also brought Masturah, who works for 1stopborneo, Fahim, who works for an NGO in Sabah and Charlotte who is from Northern Ireland and is an intern. The 5 of us (Shavez, Masturah, Fahim and Charlotte) would stay at Aslan's house and spend a lot of time together. So after the coffee break, we drove 1 ½ hours to Labi Road and settled into the house. We were close, approximately 10 kms, towards the dead end of Labi Road. From there, the forest continues all the way into Sarawak, which is the Malaysian part of Borneo.

After a meal, all prepared by Alan's wife (a great cook), we left at 21 hours on the 31st to



attend a **true authentic cultural event, Selamat Hari Gawai, at the Longhouse at the dead end of Labi Road.**

Shavez explained to me that every year, the 31st of May he is in the Longhouse as he has been welcomed and incorporated in this family about 10 years ago. He is helping them with all sorts of things and is setting up some ecotourism activities in the area. What a privilege it was for me to be there! It did not feel strange for me to be

there, they were extremely nice, I just blended in and could observe the event, the people and its interactions. Thanks Shavez!!

The following morning, after an early walk, Shavez explained to me the programme for the next three days. Night drives every day, a nice nature walk to a waterfall, a boat ride to try to observe some good wildlife and on two nights I had to give a nature talk/presentation to two societies in Brunei.

On the 1st of June, we had a great boat ride, saw the **Wrinkled Hornbills**, **Silver Langurs**,



Long-tailed Macaques and a huge **Saltwater Crocodile**. We also managed to see different **snake species; Banded Coral Snake, Banded Cat Snake and a Kukri Snake**. The Kukri Snake was found by one of Shavez's friends, we picked it up at his friend's home in Bandar and released it at Labi Road. Well done

again Shavez!!





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The first talk was on the 2nd of June at the Royal Yacht Club Brunei for the Brunei Nature Society, which is chaired by Professor Ulmar Grafe, whom I met earlier. There was a nice crowd of around 40 people, and they seemed to enjoy my stories, adventures and images of amazing places and wildlife all over the world. Prior to the



presentation I had a lengthy talk with **Andrew Hearn**, a scientist who has worked for more than 20 years in Borneo and is the **authority** when it comes to **research towards the Bornean cats and especially towards the Bornean Clouded Leopard**. As such his work has been instrumental to the eco-tourism, especially the mammal watching bits with regard to the Wildcat species in Borneo. What a nice guy and great to have met him, I listened to all his stories with great interest. Especially, when we talked about the **Bornean Bay Cat, the most elusive Wildcat Species there is in the world**. It is rarely seen and is best known from Camera Traps. His story of about 20 years ago when he saw one in the wild was thrilling!!! He is one of the very few people in the world who has seen all the 5 Wildcat species in Borneo. When Ulmar Grafe added with his story (which everybody knew, except obviously for me) that only 2 weeks ago he had the Bornean Bay Cat on one of his camera traps in an area that they are studying, more excitement was added! To speak with these persons and hear their stories was excellent, many thanks Andrew Hearn and Ulmar Grafe!!

After the talk, we had a quick dinner somewhere in Town and headed back to Aslan's house at Labi Road. We had 10 minutes of rest, we left Masturah, Fahim and Charlotte at the house, and Shavez and I went for a night drive. I think we started at 00:30 midnight or so. We drove on Labi Road towards the end and returned, using both spotlights as well as a thermal. Every time we returned at the house, Shavez said we have two options 1) End the drive and have a



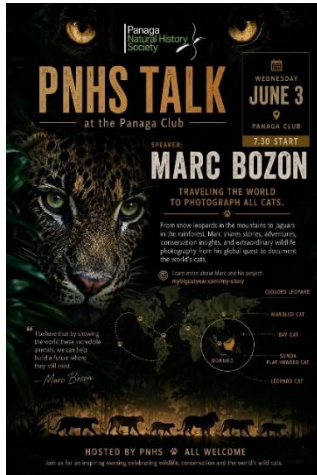
nice rest or 2) Do one more drive. I think he repeated that 3 times and each time the answer was 'Let's go for option 2!', followed by some laughs. So we continued and got a **Philippine Slow Loris, Island Palm Civets, Small-toothed Palm Civets, my first Sunda Leopard Cat** (only a glimpse) but then around 3 AM, we had our **mega find, a Sunda Pangolin!!! A critically endangered species** which I was hoping for to see one day ... and it happened!!! We had a great and lengthy observation and the two of us were ecstatic!! Long hours and hard work but it paid off!





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Next day, we had a relaxed day and in the afternoon, we went to Bandar (the capital), walked around a bit and went to the **Panaga Club for the talk/presentation for the [Panaga Natural](#)**



[History Society](#). I was greeted warmly by Marloes Janssen and Kim Bos (both were Dutch) and we all had a nice dinner together. The talk was good and people were very interested and asked many questions, always good. After the talk, the suggestion was made to do a night drive together. So Mister Bong offered to drive and we, Shavez, Marloes, Kim and I went into the 'bakkie', spotlighting and using the thermal. Although it was an interesting road with good habitat, we did not manage to see much, except for a nice **Buffy Fish Owl, Oriental Pied Hornbills** and many **Long-tailed Macaques**. However, we had fun and it was a great outing. Thanks again mister Bong and Marloes and Kim for a great evening!!!

Next morning we drove to Miri in Sarawak and took the flight to Kota Kinabalu. After arriving,



I checked into the hotel close next to the apartment of Shavez. It was nice to freshen up and get a hot shower. In the afternoon we went to the Centre and had a meeting with the director of the Sabah Tourist board. It went well and we spoke about eco-tourism, the different aspects of it and the potential of those specific 5 Wildcats occurring in Sabah. Afterwards we went to the office of the [Sabah society](#) where I had my third talk/presentation. Great people and nice to be there and talk about nature and its wildlife. A quick dinner afterwards and back to the hotel for a night's rest.

Next morning at 07 am to the airport for the flight to Sandakan. There we were met by our guides Chun and Cathy who would guide us for the beginning of the trip. We also met Jens and Mattanja at the airport and later on we picked up Janco and Esther and Steeve who would be joining the whole trip. Nice people and great skills for Mammal Watching. Jens is from Sweden and a keen Mammal Watcher; he is one of the few western people who ever has seen the Mainland Clouded Leopard! Matthias is Dutch and has great knowledge about mammals and is a keen photographer. Janco also is Dutch and is one of the very few Dutch persons who has seen many of the wildcats out there, he is currently at 29 Wildcat species, impressive!! Esther and Steeve are Swiss but moved last year to South Africa. They are both into mammals and birds (just like me) and are truly passionate about nature and its wildlife!





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Very pleased to travel with such nice people with great qualities. **Let's go and find some great Bornean wildlife and the potential 5 Wildcat species!**

We were off to Beluran Safaris where we would stay 6 nights. Beluran is a fairly recently opened eco-tourism location operated by OnestopBorneo. It is a selective logging plantation with some great secondary forest. All wildlife is out there and we would be going out all nights on long night drives. We stayed at one of the forest houses and that was fine. No aircon but fans, basic rooms but clean and safe. Breakfast at the house and lunch at the reception of the KTS Plantation SDN BHD company, dinner as well but sometimes also just in the forest when we go for deep and very lengthy night drives.



The first two days we had a morning boat trip, afternoon and night drives and the place is stunning and teemed with wildlife. We had good sightings of **Long-tailed Macaque, Pig-tailed Macaque, Maroon Langur, Bornean Orangutan, Sambar, Stink Badger, Moonrat, Small-toothed Palm Civet, Island Palm Civet, Malay Civet, Philippine Slow Loris, Prevost Squirrel, Black Flying Squirrel, Thomas Flying Squirrel and the Sunda Leopard Cat!! My 11th Wildcat species**, I saw it already in Brunei, but this time we had a far better sighting and could photograph it.



Bird wise it was also good with highlights being the **Helmeted Hornbill, Blyth's Frogmouth, Barred Eagle-Owl and the Red-legged Crane.**

So 22 more days to go and 4 more Wildcat species ... !!





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The impossible is possible, the Holy Grail of all the 40 Wildcat species in the world; the Borneo Bay Cat, only seen by a handful of westerners up to now, and we saw it!!!

9th of June Beluran Safaris, Sabah, Malaysia – with 1stopBorneo

We were on our fourth day in Beluran, a selective logging area and a forest adjacent to Deramakot which is famous for its Clouded Leopard sightings. 1StopBorneo only started operating recently in Beluran so it is a fairly new area where mammal watching trips have been taking place.

We had a great group of people with many qualities when it comes to Mammal Watching;

- **Jens Hauser** – From Sweden, well known and respected photographer mammal watcher. His mammal watching quest in his life is to find and photograph the seven big cats. He has seen almost all of them, including the Mainland Clouded Cat which is very rarely seen. The only one missing is the Sunda Clouded Leopard and that is the reason why he joined this trip which is his seventh to Borneo!!! What a commitment.

- **Janco van Gelderen** – Well known in the mammal watching community. He has seen 29 Wildcat species so far in the world and is the top 10 of the rankings on Mammalwatching.com

- **Mattanja Peppelman** – Very keen mammal watcher from the Netherlands who goes out thermal imaging in the south of the Netherlands to find the European Wildcat. He has also led Nature travel tours in South Africa. Experienced traveller and keen photographer.

- **Steve Michaud and Esther Frueh** – Swiss born but moved last year to South Africa to enjoy nature. Keen naturalists with Steve enjoying tracking mammals and photographing. Esther, keen on both mammals and birds and very good at identifying and describing characteristics of the mammals and birds she sees.

So, together, with myself, a very experienced group of Mammal Watchers and Nature Lovers for this trip in Borneo which has been set up and organized very well by 1StopBorneo.





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The last couple of days we had some great night drives with many good mammal sightings



like **Bornean Orangutan, Pig-tailed Macaque, Long-tailed Macaque, Maroon Langur, Philippine Slow Loris, Small-Toothed Palm Civet, Island Palm Civet, Malayan Civet, Binturong, Sunda Stink Badger, Moon Rat, Large Sunda Tree Mouse, Sambar,**

Lesser and Greater Mouse-deer, Black Flying Squirrel, Tomas Flying Squirrel, Prevost's Squirrel, Large Treeshrew and seven Sunda Leopard Cats.

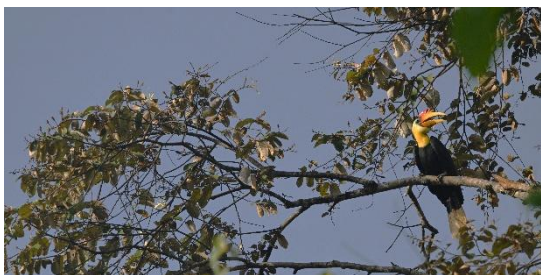


So on Tuesday the 9th of June, we headed out for an afternoon drive in Beluran. We left at 15:30 and would be back around 18:30 to have dinner and then go out again for a Night Drive until 00:00 AM.

Our head guide was Yulinda, however she did not join our afternoon drive as she guided one other single guest that afternoon on a boat ride in the river. The assistant Guide, Raymond was with us. He has worked for 10 years in Beluran before joining last year 1StopBorneo as an assistant guide. In his period in Beluran, he saw many, **many Leopard Cats**, one time a **Flat-headed Cat** and three times a **Sunda Clouded Leopard**. Our driver was Fazzi who has worked for over 10 years in many natural areas in Sabah. He sees **Sunda Clouded Leopards about 1 to 2 times a year. Amazingly, in his 10 years, he has had 4 times a sighting of the Borneo Bay Cat, 3 times in Deramakot and 1 time in Danum Valley.**

Our positions in the car, which has three rows of seats were;

- Front row from left to right – Steve, Raymond, Esther
- Middle row from left to right – Jens, empty seat, Mattanja
- Backend row from left to right – Marc, empty seat, Janco



So, we were out on our afternoon drive, had nice sightings of a few mammal species including good views of **Maroon (Red) Langur.**

Nice also were the **Wrinkled Hornbills** and a stunning **Storm Stork** very close to the camp when we left.





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On our way back, around 17:30, probably one km before the bridge (a marking point) in Beluran, we drove up a road going upwards as the area is a bit hilly. We came upon the top of the hill and the road bent to the right. As soon as we passed the corner, 25 meters in front of the car a small cat moved swiftly over the road from the right to the left. On the left side of the road it went into the grass, waited and or turned a bit for perhaps a second, and then went into the bush, down the hill. As soon as I saw it passing the road, I said slowly but determined 'Bay Cat, Bay Cat'. We stopped the car briefly the moment it crossed and the car stood still when the Cat was on the left side of the road and arrived at the grass at the edge. But it went almost directly out of sight.

Unfortunately, it went too quick for all of us to photograph it and only Steve managed to get a very brief view from the front face of the cat in his binoculars when the cat briefly showed its face on the side of the road. He managed to see the markings on the face.



We drove 25 meters to where it disappeared. We were all in amazement and puzzled. We all realized it was something different than what we knew and all that we ever had seen before. We jumped out of the car and questioned what each individual saw, all eight of us did see it clearly passing the road.

We agreed it was a small sized cat, small head, no patterns or spots, colour was grey/brown and a slender tail not touching the ground, and the end it curved upwards. We stood there for half an hour discussing what we saw and determining the different options. Although a few of us were convinced that we observed a **Borneo Bay Cat**, we all could still not believe it because in our minds it would be impossible. We therefore started challenging ourselves as we simply could not believe we just had seen a **Borneo Bay Cat**.

Upon arrival at our base, the analysis went further, using available images and videos on the web and in books. We wanted to double check ourselves as we were still a bit in disbelief. In the end, we also went through all the potential Cat Species in Borneo;

- **Sunda Leopard Cat**
- **Sunda Clouded Leopard**
- **Marbled Cat**
- **Flat-headed Cat**
- **Borneo Bay Cat**





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We ruled out directly the Sunda Clouded Leopard because of the size and the GISS (general impression of size and shape).

Marbled Cat was ruled out as it has a pattern, a different GISS and it has a fluffy and larger tail.

Flat-headed cat was also not an option as its tail is much thicker and very short. Also, it is much smaller, its body is a bit sturdier, its head is bigger related to the size of the body and it lives close to water.

Sunda Leopard Cat was also not an option as it had no spots, no pattern and a totally different colouring. Also, the shape and size of its tail did not match a Sunda Leopard Cat. In addition, the Sunda Leopard Cat is active at night, i.e. is Nocturnal.

So we concluded all that we have observed a Borneo Bay Cat, based upon;

- The GISS
- No pattern or spots
- Grey/Brown Colour
- Slender tail, curving a bit upright at the end of the tail
- Diurnal behaviour

In addition, Fazzi, the driver who had seen up to then, the Borneo Bay Cat four times in the last 10 years, **confirmed 100% it was a Borneo Bay Cat. Raymond, our guide, confirmed it as well.**

For more information on the **Borneo Bay Cat**, please click here for the [information on IUCN website](#). Also, on YouTube there is a [clip which shows some camera trapping images](#). Almost all images and videos are through Camera Traps as it is rarely seen in the wild.

It is slowly sinking in that it is reality and we did see a **Borneo Bay Cat**. Something I thought was not realistic and I never ever expected to see this Species. But we did and we all feel privileged to have seen this most elusive Wildcat Species in the World.

It makes my Big Cat Year at this stage already a memorable adventure which I am extremely thankful for.





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Great thanks to 1StopBorneo, Shavez Cheema, Chun, Kathy, Yulinda, Raymond, Faazi, Jens, Janco, Mattanja, and Esther and Steve for making the impossible possible!!!!

Ps. Some videos are shown on website when discussing the sighting and when we called Shavez to brief him the exciting news (taken by Janco van Gelderen)!!



The **Borneo Bat Cat** picture shown here is from a Camera trap and we are grateful to the **UBD camera team Brunei** that allowed me to show it on the website.

Many thanks to them and special thanks to Dr Ulmar Grafe!!!





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Extreme productive night drives at Maliau Basin and not one, but two rarely seen Marbled Cats!

After spending 6 nights in Beluran and seeing the [Borneo Bay Cat](#) and many other impressive wildlife, we left for Tawau Hills NP. I felt okay and managed to get through with little sleep.

The only annoying thing is that for one night drive in Beluran, we went through a small crossing with many low-hanging branches. I got three **leeches** that night. One I immediately discovered and pulled it off. The other one I discovered when we arrived at our base and I pulled out my shirt, which was totally red at the bottom, so that one was removed. The other one I only discovered the next morning on my upper leg. Now, about a week later, the wound has still not recovered. Next time, you better check your whole body afterwards when doing a drive like that! Marc, you should know better by now (speaking and writing to yourself is what you get with all the travelling 😊)!!

Tawau Hills NP was basically a stopover to Maliau Basin as this is in the southeast of Borneo, close to Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo.



Tawau is also the home base of [1Stopborneo](#) and they do have their office in the middle of the pristine jungle. Upon arrival we were met by some good-looking [Maroon Langur](#). We had a great stay there with a good shower and some nice beds. The night walk with Chun was

excellent and we managed to see some other very interesting wildlife, i.e. some good **snakes, nice frogs, interesting insects and a very impressive and very old Tarantula**. At 11 PM, I returned to my room, together with Steve and Esther, to get some well-needed sleep.



Janco, Mattanja and Jens continued and saw a [Western Tarsier](#) and around 15 roosting [Crested Partridges](#).

Also interesting was that during the night walk we passed a house in the middle of the Jungle. It was the house of **Andrew Hearn**, a scientist who has worked for more than 20 years in Borneo and is the **authority** when it comes to **research towards the Bornean cats and especially towards the Bornean Clouded Leopard**. As such his work has been instrumental to the eco-tourism, especially the mammal watching bits regarding the





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Wildcat species in Borneo. He has lived in this house for over 10 years and next to his house were the steel cages they use to catch the Sunda Clouded Leopards to radio collar them.

Next morning, the five of them, Steve, Esther, Mattanja, Jens and Janco, did some nice jungle



walks and saw the **Northern Gibbons**. I went with Kathy and three interns and volunteers for a boat ride to see the **Irrawaddy Dolphins**, they showed themselves very well around the Mangrove area. I love cetaceans and have seen over 30 already (around 35% of the world's species). I also managed to

see my first **Proboscis Monkeys**, or 'Neusapen' as we call them in Dutch.

After lunch, we continued for a five-hour drive to **Maliau Basin, primary rainforest in the southeast of Sabah**. From the entrance to the National Park, it is a road of around 20 km, partly tarred, which goes upwards to the Maliau Basin Conservation Area, a great place in the middle of the jungle. Rooms were fine and the food was very good. Except for some people from a Danish NGO, we were the only people in there. What a privilege to be there.

For the next 5 nights we drove the road most of the days for an afternoon drive from 4 PM to



6:30 PM, dinner at 7:00 PM and then a night drive from 8:00 PM to 2:00 AM. Breakfast was at 08:00 AM for those who wanted to. Most of the days, I was up at 07:00 AM, went for a morning walk through the river to the Canopy Walk (got my **Northern Gibbons** there) and returned around 08:30 AM and had breakfast. I then sat most of the days in the dining area (with good Wi-Fi and

coffee) and worked on my laptop until 1:00 PM. We then had lunch together and afterwards I retired to my room and tried to get some rest and sleep.

Around the camp area, there were some **Pig-tailed Macaques**, a lot of stunning endemic **Bornean Crested Firebacks**. Also, Jens and Mattanja saw some **Orangutans from their bedrooms** ... what a wild place!





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Shavez joined us there for the trip as he also had to lead a workshop, which was orchestrated by the Danish NGO, for local guides and forestry officers there. Shavez asked me to do my nature talk and presentation again which I loved to do and was great fun.



Shavez led the first three Night Drives, and the last two drives were led by Yulinda. The wildlife out there was phenomenal with highlights being the **Sunda Pangolins (5x), Otter Civet, Banded Civet (2x), Sunda Leopard Cat (11x), Sunda Stink Badger, Binturong (9x),**

Asian Small-clawed Otter and Malayan Porcupine (3x).

Observing a **Malayan Civet devouring a Greater Mouse Deer** was an exceptional sighting as well.



We used both Spotlights as well as thermals. Especially, Janco, Mattanja and Jens were sharp with their thermals. Steve and I mostly spotlighted just as Shavez and the local guide. On the



second night, Janco spotted something in his thermal at 8:58 PM. Upon indicating the location with his spotlight, it became clear it was a cat, resting on a branch high up in the tree. It was a **Marbled Cat**, a very rare cat and rarely seen. We could observe it for a minute and then it slowly moved downwards and disappeared into the bush. What a sighting. **Thanks Janco for the excellent**

spotting!! It was my 19th wildcat species in my life and Janco's 31st! We were euphoric as this is one of the hardest cats to see in Borneo.

The next day we were out again, together with Shavez and Yulinda. We skipped the afternoon drive and went only for the night drive. I think we may have left at 20:30. Only an hour later Shavez spotted some eyeshine, he asked the driver to roll the car backwards for 50 meters or so. And there it was, at 9:36 PM, again a **Marbled Cat** high up the trees and at a very different location than the one we saw the night before. We got views from the car, but the Cat stood up and went moving. Shavez proposed to all get out of the car as that was the best possibility to get it in view again. And so we did!!





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And to our amazement, **we could follow the [Marbled Cat](#) for over 10 minutes and saw a**



variety of its behaviour; licking itself, grooming, climbing, also downwards, headfirst, hunting a lizard or an insect and even jumping from one tree to the other! As Yulinda was filming us all and moved the view from us to the far away



and high up Marbled Cat, just at the end of the video you see its jump!! What a video, many thanks Yulinda! She also filmed us when we did a small happy dance, 'vreugdedans' in Dutch, to celebrate this remarkable observation.

For more information on the Marbled Cat, please click here for the [IUCN website](#).

For more photos and videos, please see the [Gallery section on the website](#).

Next, we are off to our final part of the trip with 3 nights at Inikea, 1 at Tawau Hills NP, 7 in Deramakot and 2 nights at Kinabatangan!

So 13 more days to go and 2 more Wildcat species ...!!





My Big Cat Year – Visit to Borneo for the Sunda Clouded Leopard and the other Wildcats – 27/05/26 to 30/06/26

Conservation success in Borneo and a 6-meter Python devouring a Sambar deer!

We had some excellent days in Maliau Basin but it was good to move on to the **next destination, Inikea**. The name sounds familiar ... and yes, it has to do with the Swedish firm Ikea as they have played a major role in financing the recovery of the degraded forests in this close to 20,000 ha area in the south of Sabah. It is secondary forest but since the start of this long-term project, the wildlife has returned and as such it harbours the endangered **Sunda Clouded Leopard, Borneo Elephant** and the **Banteng** (a kind of forest buffalo). Read more about this initiative here: [INIKEA – Borneo forest heritage](#) . **More of those initiatives would be great, where major corporations work together with governments to restore nature, its beauty and diversity.**

We stayed at a very nice place, deep in the forest, with beds with mosquito nets next to each other, divided by a big wooden shelf. The space was very open so the wind went through freely and for me it was one of the most basic but also the best places we stayed at. I guess we must be one of the very few visitors visiting this area so all was arranged specially for us, this weird group of mammal searchers ...

We had three nights and two full days in there and although we put in long hours and



worked hard for our sightings, it was very slow and we only had a few highlights. The biggest one was a **5- to 6-meter-long Reticulated Python** devouring an immature **Sambar Deer** next to the road. We watched it for over 20 minutes when the Python decided to



leave the road and hide in the bush. We were speechless and were silent for the whole 20 minutes of this incredible experience.

Another good sighting was the **Hose's Pygmy Shrew, the smallest mammal on Earth!** At first, I thought it was a kind of a beetle but, our guide, Chun's reaction made clear that this was something special. We were **close to a Banteng**, fresh tracks and dung, but we unfortunately missed it. The **Western Tarsier** was great, what a special small mammal, and I was very happy with that one as I missed it in Tawau Hills NP. Regarding the birds, the **Red-bearded Bee-eater** was stunning and especially a pair of **Nesting Bornean Bristleheads** was extraordinary. It is endemic to Borneo, very difficult to find and looks almost like a bird out of prehistory ...





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After Inikea, we made our way to Tawau Hills NP and on the way we visited **another conservation success, the Plant4Borneo elephants site.**

In 2018, 1StopBorneo Wildlife partnered with a private plantation in Tawau to plant trees in a



wildlife corridor (14 km in length ...)

which connects the large forests of Danum and Tawau and do afternoon four-wheel drive safaris to look

for **elephants**. We saw two groups of a **total of 75 animals of this**

endangered subspecies, the Borneo

Elephant. The whole population of the

elephant on this plantation has grown since 2018 to over 200 animals, i.e. more than 10% of the Bornean population. What a success, not only in terms of protecting this species but it also enables many young people to visit this place and as such it contributes to the education.

This is one of the reasons why I am so fond of travelling with [1StopBorneo](#), they really do have a full program with initiatives about conservation of habitat and the protection of wildlife!!

We stayed that night at **Tawau Hills NP**, at the office of [1StopBorneo](#). As we were there before, it always felt like coming home! Of course we had our night walk with Chun and found some nice animals of which the **Moonrat** and the **Eastern Hooded Pitta** were the highlights.

The following morning we had a 9-hour drive to **Deramakot** where we would stay for 7 nights and would go out mainly at night to **try and spot the Sunda Clouded Leopard**. It is one of the best places in Borneo for this apex predator so we would give it all to try and find this magnificent creature. About 15 to 20 years ago it was nearly impossible to find it, but nowadays, due to good scientific knowledge and skilful guides, it is possible.

We stayed at the **Deramakot Forest Reserve** in good but basic cabins. Food was great and there was Wi-Fi and coffee, so all conditions were fulfilled. We had our guide Alcey specific for Deramakot and also, Yulinda from 1StopBorneo was with us and as always, she is a great person and a good wildlife guide!





My Big Cat Year – Visit to Borneo for **the Sunda Clouded Leopard and the other Wildcats** – 27/05/26 to 30/06/26

For a few days, we made lengthy night drives from 4 PM to 3 AM, packed food for dinner which we ate in the forest. On two days we had a morning drive from 5 AM to 9 AM, then an afternoon drive from 4 PM to 6 PM, dinner, and then out for a night drive from 8 PM to 12 AM. In total we spent **more than 60 hours on the road in Deramakot**.



Results during the drives differed, the highlight was a pair of the rarely seen **Marbled Cat** which showed mating behaviour, a unique moment.

Also special was a **Sunda Leopard Cat**, hunting and taking a **Rajah Spiny Rat** for dinner. We also managed to have good observations of the **Hose's Pygmy Flying Squirrel** and even saw it gliding downwards out of a tree. Having good views of the stunning **Wallace Flying Frog** and troops of **Maroon Langur** moving through the forest was another bonus.



All in all, it was okay but we all expected more, especially **to get a glimpse of the Sunda Clouded Leopard**. It had not been observed for a while, last time was about a month ago, however we felt we could change that! Not this time, despite the hard work, long hours, good guiding, lots of thermals and spotlights, it was not our time!

After Deramakot, we had two days at the **Kinabatangan River** with many people and boats ... something we were not used to anymore. We had some nice boat drives and two nights we went searching along the riverbanks for the Flat-headed Cat. The water was high so the riverbanks were not clearly visible so unfortunately, we could not find it.

Today I am at Sepilok and have a full day for myself to do some much needed work on the laptop. Tomorrow to Sri Lanka to join another small group in search of amazing wildlife and especially the Fishing Cat!

Regarding the much sought after **Sunda Clouded Leopard**, we know we have been close to this majestic predator. At Beluran, at the beginning of the trip, we stayed at one of the staff houses. And only 100 meters further on the road, Christine Kassim, a forestry officer, filmed it back in November 2023 when it crossed the road during daytime. The video is shown down below. During our stay, after a night of heavy rain, we even found some fresh tracks further down that road and put on a camera trap. Unfortunately, we did not get it on the camera trap. But it's there! And another reason to come back to Sabah in the future.





My Big Cat Year – Visit to Borneo for **the Sunda Clouded Leopard and the other Wildcats** – 27/05/26 to 30/06/26

Not seeing the Sunda Clouded Leopard was a disappointment for all of us.

However, **we have been blessed with great wildlife and other sightings**, so we considered



ourselves to be very happy with this trip and the overall results. In addition, we really enjoyed each other's company and had some good laughs together. Essential, if you travel so long with each other. So thanks to **Esther, Steve, Mattanja,**

Janco and Jens for a great trip! And many thanks to **Chun,**

Yulinda, Kathy and Raymond for the great guiding and for

1StopBorneo for the excellent organization! **Special thanks to**

Shavez Cheema who has been a big supporter since the start of My Big Cat Year. He went the extra mile and did everything he could to make this a special trip. Thanks Shavez for your

confidence and encouragement! Click here for [the interview with Shavez](#).

Thanks again to **Mammalwatching.com** and **Jon Hall** in particular for the continuous encouragement and for the support and interest from people all over the world. For those who do not know, Jon Hall is a renowned wildlife enthusiast and the founder of [Mammalwatching.com](#), and has seen over 2400 Mammals in his life (a record!). Thanks also to **Arjan Dwarshuis** who gave me some tips for some of the countries I will be visiting and many thanks for his idea to support local NGOs in each country. That really works and makes the local connection. Arjan is a Birdwatcher, conservationist, writer and motivational speaker and has set a world record in 2016 with observing close to 7000 birds in his [Birding Big Year](#). Thanks Arjan!

One remark regarding the **Borneo Bay Cat** which we all managed to observe in Beluran. The Borneo Bay Cat, the most elusive Wildcat species in the world and the only species I was sure that I would never be able to observe. It was simply crossed out in my mind and did not appear on any target lists I had.

I would like to share one anecdote (hopefully you don't mind Sebastian) with regard to the **Borneo Bay Cat**. **Sebastian Kennerknecht, the world-famous photographer on the Wildcat species**, texted me on the 1st of June to wish me good luck in Brunei. He said 'Good luck. Brunei has great densities of Bay Cat. Would be amazing if you saw one'. I replied, stating that I would already be happy with some of the other four cats. Little did I know what would happen on the 9th of June ... Thanks again Sebastian, your good luck wish worked out! For Sebastian's and Rachel's amazing project on photographing all the Wildcat species in the world, please see here; <https://www.chasingwildcats.com/>





My Big Cat Year – Visit to Borneo for **the Sunda Clouded Leopard and the other Wildcats** – 27/05/26 to 30/06/26

All in all we had a great trip with **56 mammal species**, around **140 bird species** and **28 Reptiles and Amphibians!** For more photos and videos, please see the [Gallery section on the website](#).

I would highly recommend **1StopBorneo** for your travels in Borneo as they are professional and personal. They have great guides and personalities and they take good care of you and bring you to the wildest places. Also, and extremely important to me, they are sincere about conservation and they create impact and achieve results!

The Big Cat Year is not just about spotting wild cats. **It is also about habitat and wildlife conservation.** The aim is to support a project/organization in every country visited. With regard to Borneo we have contributed to the [Pangolin Rescue Foundation](#), which aims to rescue and protect the critically endangered Sunda Pangolin.

Would you like to contribute to supporting these important projects and/or organizations in the world with regard to conservation and protection of nature and wildlife, please have a look at the [funding page](#). All help is appreciated! Big and small, it all counts. You can already help by [buying the projects a coffee](#)





My Big Cat Year – Visit to Borneo for the Sunda Clouded Leopard and the other Wildcats – 27/05/26 to 30/06/26

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Borneo - 27 May to 30 June 2026														
Type	Mammal	Country	Seen	Singapore (4N)	Brunei (4N)	Kota Kinabalu (1N)	Beluran Safari (6N)	THP (1N)	Malau Basin (5N)	Tawau/NIKEA (3N)	Plank/Borneo Elephant (daytrip)	THP (1N)	Deramakot (7N)	Kinabatangan (2N)
Bats	Malayan Flying Fox	Borneo	1				1x		1x					
Bats	Large Flying Fox	Borneo	1										2x	
Bats	Diadem Roundleaf Bat	Borneo	1				1x		1x	1x			5x	
Bats	Lesser Sheath-tailed Bat	Borneo	1					1x				1x		
Bats	Black-capped Fruit Bat	Borneo	1							1x				
Bats	Ridley's Roundleaf Bat	Borneo	0								(1x)			
Bats	Long-tongue Nectar Bat	Borneo	1										1x	
Bats	Bat to be identified	Borneo	1										1x	
Badger	Sunda Stink Badger	Borneo	1				7x		1x				1x	
Cats	Sunda Leopard Cat	Borneo	1		1x		8x		11x	2x			21x	
Cats	Flat-headed Cat	Borneo	1											
Cats	Marbled Cat	Borneo	1						2x				1x2	
Cats	Sunda Clouded Leopard	Borneo	1											
Cats	Bay Cat	Borneo	1				1x							
Chrevotains	Lesser Mouse Deer	Borneo	1				1x		2x					
Chrevotains	Greater Mouse Deer	Borneo	1				1x	1x	6x	2x		1x	3x	
Civets and Genets	Binturong	Borneo	1				1x		9x				1x	
Civets and Genets	Borneo Striped Palm Civet (Island Palr	Borneo	1		1x		11x		2x				7x	
Civets and Genets	Masked Palm Civet	Borneo	1						7x					
Civets and Genets	Malayan Civet	Borneo	1				13x		70x	8x			4x	1x
Civets and Genets	Small Toothed Palm Civet	Borneo	1		14x		14x	1x	11x	7x			13x	
Civets and Genets	Sunda Otter Civet	Borneo	1				1x		1x					
Civets and Genets	Banded Civet	Borneo	1						2x				2x	
Colugo	Sunda Coluga	Borneo	1				3x	1x	24x	3x			17x	
Deer	Sambar	Borneo	1				2x		>50	2x			5x	
Deer	Red Muntjac	Borneo	1						1x					
Elephants	Borneo Elephant	Borneo	1									75x		1x
Gibbon	Northern (Muller) Gibbon	Borneo	1				(1x)		1x	3x				
Mouse	Ranee Mouse	Borneo	1										4x	
Mouse	Large Sunda Tree Mouse	Borneo	1				1x						1x	
Old World Monkeys	Bornean Orangutan	Borneo	1				4x						7x	
Old World Monkeys	Western Tarsier	Borneo	1					(1x)		2x				
Old World Monkeys	Philippine Slow Loris	Borneo	1		1x		8x	1x	6x	2x		1x	11x	1x
Old World Monkeys	Sabah Grey Langur	Borneo	1											
Old World Monkeys	Proboscis Monkey	Borneo	1					1x						2x
Old World Monkeys	Silver Langur	Borneo	1		6x									1x
Old World Monkeys	Long-tailed Macaque	Borneo	1		10x		18x	2x	2x	2x			3x	2x
Old World Monkeys	Southern Pig-tailed Macaque	Borneo	1				3x		3x	3x			4x	
Old World Monkeys	Maroon Langur	Borneo	1				4x	2x					5x	
Otter	Asian Small-clawed Otter	Borneo	1						1x					
Pangolins	Sunda Pangolin	Borneo	1		1x				5x					
Porcupine	Malayan Porcupine	Borneo	1						3x				1x2	
Rats	Moonrat	Borneo	1		1x		1x					1x	2x	
Rats	Gray Tree Rat	Borneo	1						1x			1x		
Rats	Rajah spiny rat	Borneo	1										1x	
Rats	Sabah Giant Rat	Borneo	1							1x				
Rats	Muller's Giant Sunda Rat	Borneo	0				(1x)							
Rats	Brown Rat	Borneo	1		1x									
Shrews	Hose's Pigmy Shrew	Borneo	1							1x				
Tree Squirrel	Thomas's Flying Squirrel	Borneo	1				3x		11x	5x			22x	
Tree Squirrel	Red Giant Flying Squirrel	Borneo	1					1x	1x				3x	
Tree Squirrel	Cream Coloured Giant Squirrel	Borneo	1										1x	
Tree Squirrel	Black Flying Squirrel	Borneo	1				4x		5x	1x			2x	
Tree Squirrel	Hose's Pigmy Flying Squirrel	Borneo	1										3x	
Tree Squirrel	Prevost's Squirrel	Borneo	1		1x (Dead)		3x						6x	
Tree Squirrel	Bornean Pigmy Squirrel	Borneo	1				1x						2x	
Tree Squirrel	Plantain Squirrel	Borneo	1		3x		1x							1x
Treeshrews	Large Treeshrew	Borneo	1				1x							
Treeshrews	Lesser Treeshrew	Borneo	1										2x	
Weasels and Relatives	Yellow-throated Marten	Borneo	1						1x					(1x)
Whales and Dolphins	Irrawady Dolphins	Borneo	1					1x						

* The Rajah Spiny Rat needs to be confirmed as well as one bat still needs identification. Between brackets means it was seen but I missed it.

