

Trip report Borneo Sabah

'A quest for wild cats and all best of the rest'

29 may – 16 june 2026



Dear reader,

To continue my search for wild cats of the world, this time a second visit to Borneo came on my path.

Borneo has 5 species of the cat family and many other great mammals and wildlife. I visited Borneo 10 years ago in 2016 and I had to come back since that time I didn't see all the cats. 2016 trip report:

<https://www.mammalwatching.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Janco-Van-G-Borneo-2016.pdf>

Marc Bozon who is now on his 'www.mybigcatyear.com' contacted me end of 2025 and told me about his plans to go and search for all the world's cats in one year in 2026. Something that most of us mammal watchers probably would like to dream of... But not all of us have the possibilities and funding for such an exclusive adventure...

I asked Marc if he would maybe like to do a part of his plans in his big cat year together, for example in a place where I also had 'new' cats to find. So, we could both enjoy the 'euphoria' of seeing a (new) cat species. Marc was ok with this and would give some suggestions of the plans he had. After checking the options, for me Borneo was favourite. The period in the year (June), number of days in the field, variety of places to visit, chances of cats and budget all fitted best.

Marc had already contact with *Shavez Cheema* the founder of [Home | 1stopborneo.org](http://Home.1stopborneo.org) and Shavez had also already for him a rather special long but nice trip itinerary. This almost '30-day program' was very complete, but my budget was limited... So, I decided to join only the first half of this tour which included: *Beluran, Tawau Hills* and *Maliau basin*, all new places for me and that's what also attracted me. The *Kinabatang* was planned at the end of the original tour, I decided to book a short private part before the 'big' tour because I wanted to try for *Flat headed cat*. I started in Borneo with one night in *Sepilok*. I knew from my first visit that it's a nice place to start your trip. You can walk around yourself in the *Rainforest Discovery Centre (RDC)*. I also wanted to try here for *tarsier* since I missed it in 2016. That time I visited: *Kinabalu, Deramakot, Danum, Sepilok* and *Kinabatangan*.

The '*big 30 day*' tour was also promoted online via www.Mammalwatching.com and 4 others joined the tour. So, we were total six '*cat focussed mammal watchers*' (excluding the different local guides & driver) for the next two weeks!

Note: Marc already shared a trip report <https://www.mammalwatching.com/community-post/my-big-cat-year-borneo-and-the-search-for-the-five-wildcat-species-and-other-unique-wildlife-and-habitat/> of the tour.

So, I will just focus in my trip report on the sightings of the part of the tour I joined and my private part.

I is mostly an impression of the photos of the wildlife I took. Back in 2016 I had the luck to see a *Clouded leopard* (Deramakot), so for me the pressure to see *this cat* was not as high as for most other participant who had not seen this cat yet. Off course I still hoped to see this cat again. With quite a lot of nights ahead I felt we would have a fairly chance... So, I had a tour of almost three weeks ahead in the field to see and photograph as many mammals as possible. As always, I try for nice pictures of the wildlife & scenery for good memories back home. I hope you'll enjoy this report, Borneo has so much to offer. Feel free to commend or ask questions.

I want to special thank *Marc Bozon* for initiating this trip and that he was willing to let me join. Off course thanks for the other participants: *Steve & Esther, Mattanja and Jens* for making this a pleasant, positive and most of all a *very productive* tour!

Another great thanks to the staff and guides of **OnestopBorneo**: *Shavez, Yulina, Kun, Roman, Fuzzy...* who organised and guided this tour with great effort. It worked out very well and was a great experience. I can recommend every mammal watcher to organise a great tour with them.

At last, always thanks to www.mammalwatching.com for presenting such worth full trip reports.

Best greetings,

Janco van Gelderen

Utrecht, Netherlands (Holland), (Instagram, although not very active)

General information

Preparation

Last year I bought a used, but still well-functioning thermal (pulsar) and I was happy to bring this. It is a true '*gamechanger*' in sightings. I also brought a small *laser spotlight* that was handy to point the wildlife even at distance. Further I prepared as what I did in 2016.

Itinerary

- Day 1 > Fly Amsterdam – Kuala Lumpur
- Day 2 > Arrive Kuala Lumpur, overnight at airport
- Day 3 > Fly Sandakan (early morning): afternoon walk in Sandakan Rainforest Park.
- Day 4-5 > Transfer to Sepilok (B&B) visit RDC and night walk, morning walk
- Day 5-7 > Transfer to Kinabatangan 3 day/night (boat rides)
- Day 8-14 > **Join the group**, transfer to Beluran (safaris/night)
- Day 15 > Transfer Tawau hills (night walk/morning walk)
- Day 16-20 > Transfer Maliau Basin (safaris/night)
- Day 21 > Transfer Tawau, fly to KL > Fly to Amsterdam

Sleeping

- **Sepilok** - I stayed in the B&B (very nice place close to RDC).
- **Kinabatangan** - I stayed in de Sakau Greenview lodge which is also a comfortable place
- **Beluran** - We stayed in the local houses, which was a bit basic but still a nice place and area.
- **Tawau Hills** - We stayed in the headquarters houses, very nice place.
- **Maliau Basin** - We stayed in the park lodge, a very nice and pleasant place.

Logistics

All transfers were arranged by one stop Borneo and were pleasant and on schedule.

Money

I got some cash at the airport; you can get money from ATM in the larger towns.

Roads/Safety

The roads were mostly good and sometimes bumpy (for example to Maliau Basin).

Daily schedule

Daytime safaris/walks and night safaris

Weather

Hot and humid. Mostly every day there was rain in the afternoon and/or early evening. Two nights were spoiled by longer (late) rains.

Summary of the places visited:

Sandakan Rainforest Park

I had a walk in this park on the trails. The trails were rather steep at some points, but it was a nice first experience with the 'jungle' and I saw my first **Plantain Squirrel**, a *lizard and a snake* and some nice butterflies and birds. Bring enough water, it is 'hot!'. There is a small shop/terrace for drinks.

Sepilok (Rainforest Discovery Centre)

I walked on the trails, the canopy trail and had a look from the watch towers. Great views but not so much wild-life. Last time I saw here some *Orangutan* but this time only some **Pig-tailed Macaques**, **Prevost's Squirrels** and a **Plantain Squirrel**. On the night walk I saw a **Lesser Mouse Deer** but no *tarsier*. Unlucky the night walk had to stop early because heavy rain started just half an hour after we started 😞

Kinabatangan

Here I had nice 'general' boat rides in the morning and afternoon and 'private' night boat rides. I also joined a short night walk. We saw in the daytime boat trips many primates and some good birds; At night I unlucky missed out on the *Flat headed cat*.... However, I did see here a **Sunda Pangolin**.

Beluran

This is a nice place. Most night drives were productive with lots of nice mammals. The highlight was a **Bay Cat** on the road just in front of the car late afternoon. In daytime the area was calm and mostly birds were seen. We also had here two boat rides (afternoon and morning) where we got **Orangutan** and **Long-tailed macaques**.

Tawau Hills

We had a very productive night walk; the guides were very keen and showed us some nice animals. Here I saw my first **tarsier**. What a very nice little mammal! In the early morning, we enjoyed a **Gibbon** family calling & foraging in a very high tree just at the parking lot.

Maliau Basin

This was *the surprise* of the tour. This beautiful park had the most productive wildlife viewing. The lodge is very nice situated. A visit to the *watchtower* I would recommend, you can have great views over endless pristine rainforest! Here we spotted no more than: *five Sunda Pangolins*, *two Marbled Cats* and *an Otter Civet*!

Overall experiences/impression:

Borneo 'delivered' great wildlife again. It is a sweaty place with such a huge variety of wildlife. Going in a 'cat-focussed' group was nice and productive! We worked well together and we had many good sightings.

Maliau Basin was for me the pleasant surprise, and I would recommend adding it in your itinerary!

In the tour we were lucky to see quite some rather 'rare' mammals. I don't know if it was pure luck, the weather or period of the year. **Six different pangolins!**? **2 Otter Civet** And off course the **Bay cat** in Beluran was THE total surprise! For me personally the two sightings of **Marbled cat** in Maliau Basin were also very, very joyful.

Finally, it is all about putting effort and many hours of searching. You'll probably see what you want in the end, but a matter of luck is always necessary in this place... Some guests get a clouded leopard; and others must try for a fifth or sixth time or even more.... This time I didn't see it although, I thought with so many nights there would have been a fair chance. I will come back for another try for Flat-headed cat and enjoy this great island and its pure nature again.

All mammals seen noted in the trip list.

TRIP LIST MAMMALS

Areas visited: SANDAKAN RAINFOREST PARK (SK), SEPILOK (SP), KINABATANGAN (KB), BELURAN (BR), TAWAU HILLS (TH), MALIAU BASIN (MB).

Plantain Squirrel – a few here and there Sepilok. (SK, SP) *

** Some small squirrels (brownish) I was not very sure which one it was, I kept it than for plantain squirrel*

Prevost's Squirrel – A few on the walks in Sepilok RDC and one in a roadside tree towards RDC, further seen here and there. (SP, BR, MB)

Giant Squirrel – One individual seen well from the 'Hornbill Tower' in Sepilok. (SP)

Bornean Pigmy Squirrel – A single animal in Beluran. (BR)

Thomas's Flying Squirrel – a few during night safari in Beluran and Maliau (BR, MB)

Black Flying Squirrel – a few during night safari in Beluran and Maliau (BR, MB)

Red Giant Flying Squirrel – At dusk seen in Sepilok at the canopy walk at the place where they are seen every day. Another one seen on the night walk in Tawau Hills. (SP, TH)

Sunda Colugo – Quit a lot this time during night safari in Beluran, Maliau, also a nice one close by during the night walk in Tawau Hills. (BR, TH, MB)

Binturong – Seen well in Beluran and Maliau during night safaris (BR, MB)

Sunda Skunk – seen around 5 times in Beluran and at least one in Maliau. They walk funny and you do can smell them! (BR, MB)

Moonrat – one crossed the road in Beluran during night drive (BR)

Lesser Mouse Deer – one animal on my to short night walk in Sepilok, it was too quick for a photo. (BR)

Greater Mouse Deer – Seen well in Tawau Hills on the walks in dark. A few in Beluran and Maliau. (BR, TH, MB)

Sambar – a few seen in Beluran (shy), very common in Maliau (BR, MB)

Red Muntjac – one briefly in the roadside on the first afternoon drive in Maliau. (MB)

Bornean Orangutan – At the Kinabatangan 6 animals, off which 5 together in two trees next to each other: mother with small cub and young male above in the same tree. Two sub-adults young in the next tree, all seen from the boat. Further seen twice in Beluran (one from the boat safari). (KB, BR)

(Southern) Pig-tailed Macaque – a few singles in Sepilok in the RDC and a large family in the garden of the B&B. Further seen at almost all other places but not in large numbers. (SP, KB, BR, MB)

Long-tailed Macaque – Many across the river sides of the Kinabatangan and seen in almost all other places (KB, BR, TH, MB)

Silvered Langur – a few animals seen from the boat in the Kinabatangan, but far less common than other primates. (KB)

Maroon Langur – two animals seen at the Kinebatangan (quite rare there), a few times in Beluran but very shy and a few more bold animals in Tawau Hills around the parking lot. (KB, BR, TH)

North Borneo Gibbon – In Beluran a brief view of one jumping down from a high tree to lower trees in the afternoon. A small family seen and heired well in Tawau Hills early morning at the parking lot. (BR, TH)

Philippine Slow Loris – 1 animal at the Kinabatangan. Many sightings in Beluran of which one taking a shortcut on a telegraph line. A few in Maliau. (KB, BR, MB)

Western Tarsier – one seen in Tawau Hills during nightwalk very nice little mammal! (TH)

Sunda Pangolin – not less than six in total! First animal seen on the ground in a small side creek during night boat ride Kinabatangan. Five different sightings during night drives in Maliau. (KB, MB)

Masked Palm Civet – a few singles from the night boat safari in the Kinabatangan and one animal in Maliau. (KB, MB)

Malay Civet – many on the road during night safari in Beluran and Maliau. (BR, MB)

Small toothed Palm Civet – several seen during night safari in trees and on the road Beluran and Maliau. (BR, MB)

Island Palm Civet - several seen during night safari in trees and on the road Beluran and Maliau (BR, MB)

Otter Civet – two seen in total: first one seen in Beluran, crossing the road in a marshy area just before for the main park entrance, too quick for a photo. The second animal seen very well running in a ditch on a night drive in Maliau (BR, MB).

Banded Civet – 4 seen during night drives Maliau, very nice animals! (MB)

Asian Small-Clawed Otter – 1 seen in ditch during night safari Maliau (MB)

Flying Fox – seen in dusk flying across the river Kinabatangan and a few in a fruiting tree in Beluran. (KB, BR)

Sunda Leopard Cat – 2 to 3 seen each night during night safaris usually on the road in Beluran and Maliau. Only the fourth cat we saw in Beluran was the one to get my first photo of this cat 😊 (Last time in 2016 I saw six and didn't get a photo... They now seem to be bolder in Deramakot that I this time didn't visit). (BR, MB)

Bay Cat – Trip highlight one animal crossing just in front of the car on the road in late afternoon, too quick for a photo unlucky... (BR)*

**During the sighting I was in the last bench in the back of the jeep and didn't see it at first, but when I stood up, I could see it walking towards our car and it then walked into the left roadside. It walked rather low on the ground (probably because it was skittish). At first, I didn't know what we now really saw, but the brown colour could only mean Bay cat. I did see the tale well and that it was of a cat. Before the trip I didn't read much about this cat since you expect it to be a needle in a haystack to find this one. Later at home I read in the Lynx edition (carnivores) more about this cat. I there find that the bay cat is of a different size (smaller) and different shape/morph than the mainland golden cat (bay cat is more size house cat). It is in my opinion also a bit more weasel kind of cat (like jaguarundi). Also, the bay cat camera trap photo that Marc Bozon placed in his trip report looks like the animal we saw. I think there is just not so much information about these cats yet.*

Marbled Cat – two different animals on different night drives in Maliau. Both seen in in the centre of the tree on a branch of a rather large tree. The first one seen only for half a minute. The second cat was seen for about a minute laying, walking, grooming and jumping from branch to branch. (MB)

Large Sunda tree Mouse – one animal clearly seen in a tree during night drive in Beluran (BR)

At least two species of Rat, 'large and small types' during night boat safaris in the smaller Creeks of Kinabatangan. (KB)

Different bats – I have some photos of several bats we saw but, don't id each (the group did).

Banteng – uncertain probably one single animal (only in thermal) in roadside during night safari Beluran.

A very large cow like animal (shape female) showed up in thermal, unlucky It disappeared quickly deep in the forest before we were closer to the animal. (BR)



Sepilok early morning, a great welcome to the jungle





Giant Squirrel (Sepilok)



Prevost's Squirrel (Sepilok)



Pig-tailed Macaque around the B&B in Sepilok





Plantain squirrel along the road to RDC Sepilok





Kinabatangan, the Sakau Greenview Lodge (up) & Kinabatangan side Creek (down)





Silvered Langur mother and child (Kinabatangan)



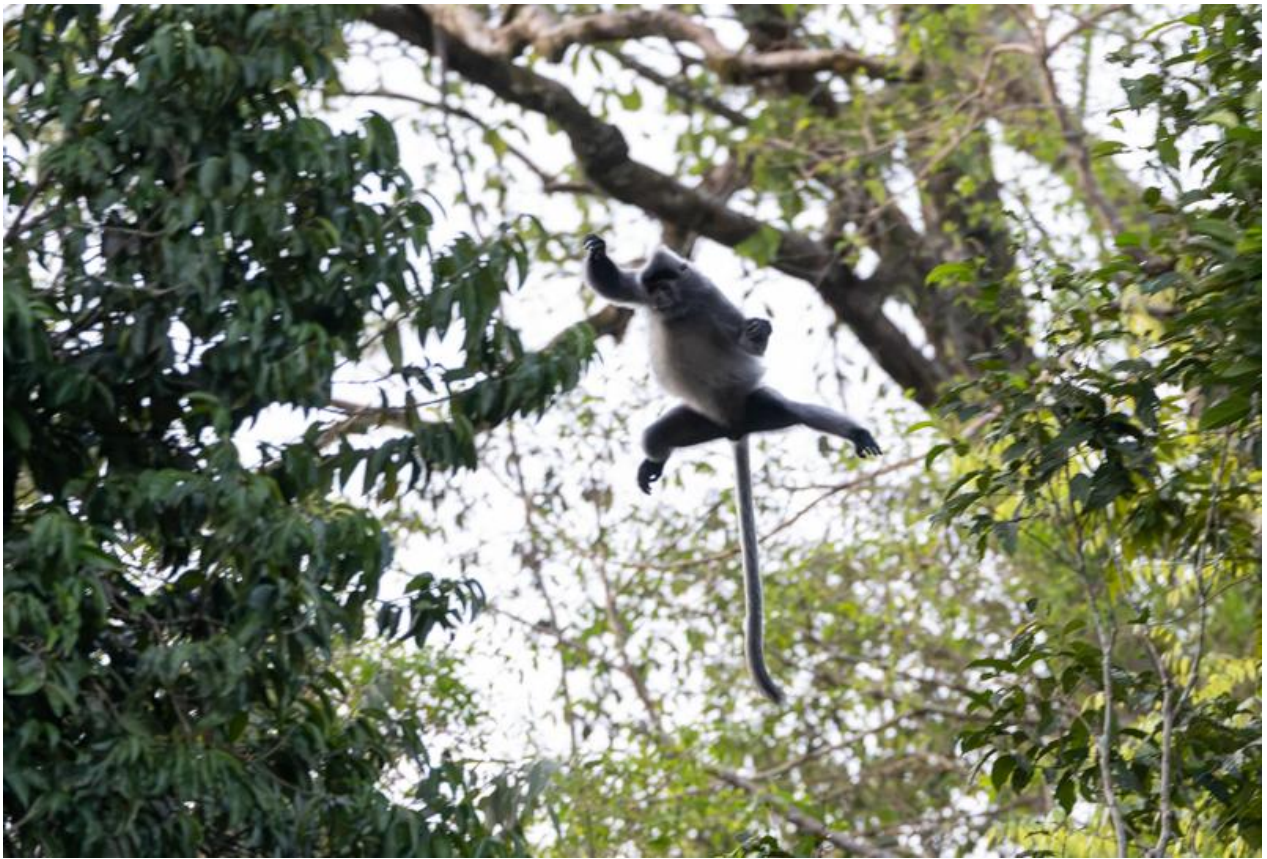
The big boss Proboscis monkey looking around (Kinabatangan)



Orangutan young male (Kinabatangan)



Proboscis Monkey jumping

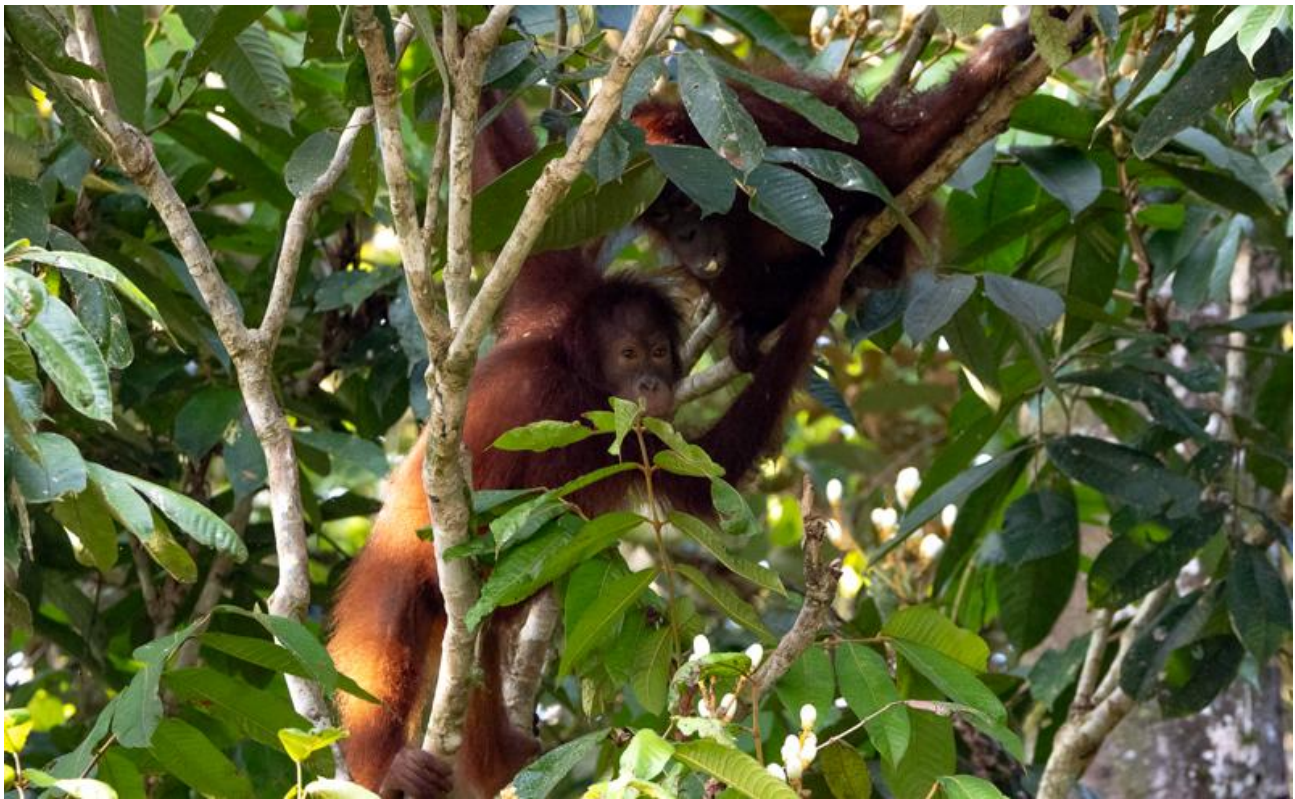


Silvered Langur jumping (Kinabatangan)





Long-tailed Macaque mother en curious junior (Kinabatangan)



Two young Orangutan at the Kinabatangan



Orangutan mother en child (Kinabatangan)



The big boss Proboscis monkey (Kinabatangan)



The big boss Proboscis monkey (Kinabatangan)



Nice surprise: Sunda Pangolin in Kinabatangan





Beluran forest view (up) & The group searching for wildlife (down)



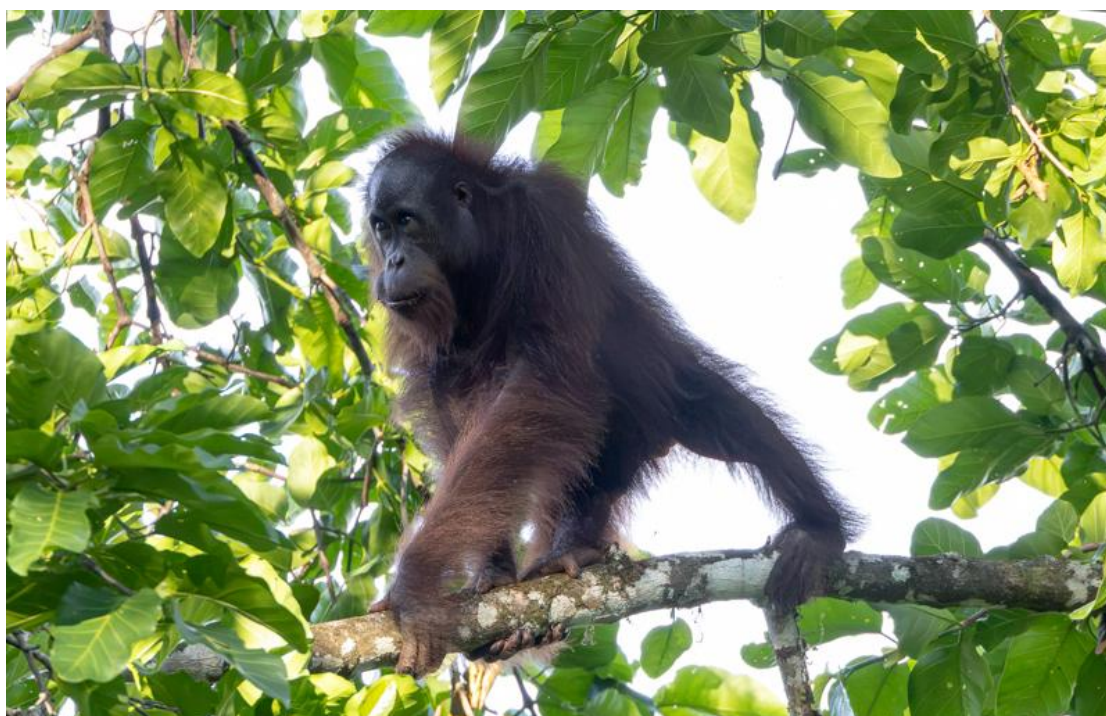


View from the Beluran river cruise (up) & Long-tailed Macaques during early morning river cruise





Young Orangutan posing in a tree from the road Beluran





In Beluran I got my first photo of a (Sunda) Leopard cat, the most seen cat during the trip



Large sunda tree mouse (Beluran)



Slow Loris choosing the streamlines as road (Beluran)



A family of Island Palm Civet on the road (Beluran)



Probably a Plantain Squirrel in Beluran

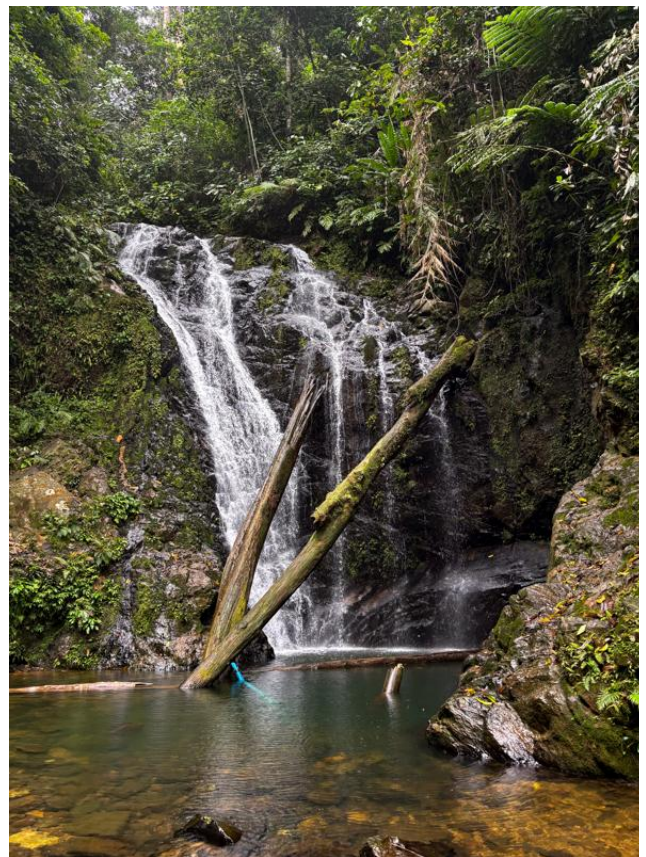


Sunda Skunk we saw a few in Beluran, usually too quick for a photo



Bornean Striped Palm Civet (Beluran)





Tawau Hills headquarters, an impressive tree & walk to the waterfall



My first and only Western Tarsier



Maroon Langur in Tawau Hills



Maroon Langur together with a curious Long-tailed Macaque (Tawau Hills)





Gibbon mother and child (Tawau Hills)



Gibbon free fall (Tawau Hills)



Maliau Basin beautiful primary rainforest



Maliau Basin Watch tower view (up) & typical road view (down)





Sambar deer (Maliau)



Common sight Sambar deer along the roadsides



Asian Small-clawed Otter (Maliau)





Curious Marbled cat (Maliau)



Marbled cat jumping from one tree to another! (Maliau)



Banded Civet (Maliau)



Malay Civet with a dead Greater Mouse deer (Maliau)



Some bats seen during the trip





Yellow-throated Marten, nice daytime surprise in Maliau





Leopard cat, the most seen cat species (Maliu)



Long-tailed Macaque big male at the parking lot



Malay Civet in Maliau



Masked Palm Civet in Maliau



Otter Civet! great surprise of Maliau!





Colugo seen here and there.





Black-Flying squirrel (Beluran)



Flying fox (Beluran)



The first Marbled cat, just as beautiful as expected (Maliau)
The mother lynx at the fallow deer carcass on the second day



Malayan Porcupine (Maliau)



2 of the 5 Pangolin we got in Maliau Basin





Greater Mouse deer (Maliau)





Relaxing Binturong & Banded Civet (Maliau)



Some birds & amphibians & reptiles



A very big Tarantula in Tawau Hills ('old lady' according to the guide)



