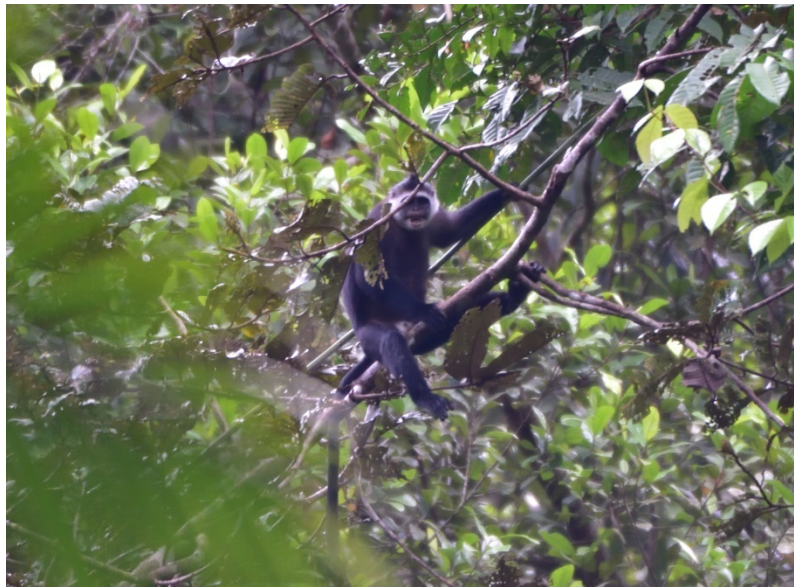


## Siberut 2018

An old report from a September 2018 trip to the Mentawai islands in an attempt to see the endemic primates (Kloss's's gibbon, pig-tailed snub-nosed langur, Mentawai langur, and Mentawai macaque) I had the help of Dami and Ismael who are both part of the team that has been monitoring the primates around Tololaggo village on Siberut. I was also aided by Frengky, and Ismael's father, Jonas, who was in charge of navigating the forest and locating the primates.

The journey to get there was pretty long starting with a flight from Jakarta to Padang then the fast ferry to Siberut via Sipora the following morning. Ticket info/times can be found on [Mentawaifast.com](http://Mentawaifast.com). The website seems to go offline quite frequently but they are always contactable through social media. We stayed one night in Uma Malinggai before setting off for our campsite the following morning. A couple of hours on a canoe through the mangroves and then a bit longer along the coast in the open sea and then we arrived in the small village of Tololaggo (I may be spelling that wrong, I got three different spellings off three different people). About an hour hiking followed before we got to the place where we would stay for the next five days. We set off into the forest late afternoon and almost immediately got a very brief glimpse of the Mentawai langur. The rest of the afternoon was uneventful but gave a good impression of the terrain we would be up against. It was incredibly hilly, very deep mud, and absolutely covered in rattan.



The following morning we set off before dawn around with the sound of the Kloss's's gibbons wailing in the dark. I've heard it claimed it possesses the most beautiful call in the animal kingdom and from what little I've experienced it's hard to disagree. Jonas informed they were calling from an inaccessible part of the forest though so we set our sights on trying to find the pig-tailed snub-nosed langur (Simakobu). And just as the sun was coming up, or at least it was somewhere behind the clouds, we came across two infants directly above us in the trees on a steep embankment. They stopped and stared for a couple of moments before the screaming of their group told them to get moving. We had views of six or seven crashing away through the trees.

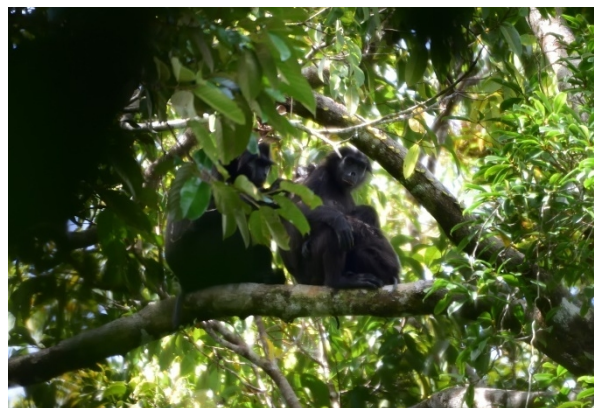
And then quite possibly the highlight of the trip as a big male of the much rarer white/golden morph leapt into view through the mist. He hung around hollering for about 20 seconds then he was gone into the mist. It was a breathtaking experience.



The rest of the day afforded a few more distant Simakobu sightings before rain ended our hopes for the day but not before we had chanced upon two Mentawai scops owls that we accidentally disturbed roosting very low down by the river. (We also saw the endemic Mentawai malkoha early one morning.)

Ismael went out at night in light drizzle to look for more owls at night time and came back with a picture of the Mentawai civet. We tried numerous times after but never had any luck. They informed me it was quite a surprise to have found one there. We also tried around the gardens near the harbor back in Siberut where I have read people found them quite easily but we didn't get anything.

The following day started with some more distant Mentawai langurs and Simakobu before the rain started. It stayed around pretty much all day but we did see what we believed to be the Golden-bellied tree shrew. Cameras were locked away in the waterproofs at the time though.



The next morning brought the Kloss's's gibbon. First, we encountered a family of three which proved very elusive and disappeared down the hillside. All the primates we encountered were exceedingly shy. Hunting is still very common on the islands. Then we got a huge slice of luck when after about an hour of painstaking crawling through the undergrowth towards what we thought were three

gibbons, the trees exploded into life and there were at least nine Kloss's gibbons swinging and whooping all around. The reports I'd read suggested Kloss's gibbons to be fiercely territorial—so what that many gibbons were doing together, I have no idea but it was overwhelming trying to keep track with so many swinging all around. Ismael mentioned he had seen families close together like that before but not quite so close. The rain returned not long after and we returned to camp soaking wet but very happy.



We got good sightings of a Mentawai langur youngster play fighting with his father later the following afternoon. From what I've read they are the only monogamous leaf monkey species and to see such small groups was very interesting. Their alarm call is very special indeed. Before that we had gone much deeper into the forest to the place where Jonas had seen the Mentawai macaque previously. He heard them but the terrain made it impossible to get anywhere near to set eyes on them. The rain came again, preventing any night time activities.



The final day was pretty much a wipeout due to the weather. It really rains in Mentawai and it had been saving the best until last. The whole jungle floor was covered in two feet of water within a very short time and turned the previously passable rivers into raging white water. We ended up taking quite the detour in the end as many of the rivers became impassable.

We left the camp late that afternoon and stayed one night in Tololaggo village. We spotlighted the night and came across a couple of Siberut flying squirrels. There were a couple of very unusual bats that I wish I had managed to get a picture of with like a floppy, dangling nose that I would love to get an ID on if anyone knows of anything present in the area that could match that rather lame description.



We took the canoe back the following morning only to find our timing was out and the canoe had to be pushed through the mud in the mangroves for an hour or so. This did mean we got to see some spectacular crabs and a very nice reticulated python though.



One more night in Uma Malinggai, where we tried unsuccessfully for the civet in light drizzle, then back to Padang on the ferry the following morning. Dog-faced water snakes frequent the gutters at the front of the Uma Malinggai accommodation hunting prawns.

Just a couple of notes:

- Mentawai is still considered a high risk area for Malaria. The pharmacies close to the harbor in Padang do sell anti-malaria medication but if they actually have it in stock is another matter. We visited four before we found one that had it in stock. Maybe just take it with you.
- Definitely take wellies/rubber boots. Within the first five steps of leaving camp you'll be up to your knees in mud.



- Jonas, Dami, Frengky, and Ismael did a fantastic job cooking and making food. You might need to be a fan of freshly caught boiled frogs though.



- If you do take the ferry I suggest taking a jacket or long pants if you get a seat inside. The AC is seriously cranking for the whole journey.
- Ismael, Dami, and Wawan, the guy who helped me put it altogether, can be contacted through the Swaraowa Organization. They are trying to set the place up as the place to see the endemic primates and seem to be working very hard to do so.

We also came across this squirrel a couple of times but failed to ID it.

