

A Belated Report From A November 2017 Trip To Northern Vietnam For Tonkin Snub-Nosed Monkeys



My dream species and one I thought was going to pass me by until I managed to get in contact with Dr. Quyet Le Thac. He helped with all the necessary permits and also guided me throughout the whole trip. He was fantastic and is the guy for Tonkin Snub-nosed monkeys.

Started in Hanoi where I was met by Luc Nguyen, who I had met previously when I went for the red-shanked doucs in Son tra, Nhat Tan La, and Vanson Trinh who did the driving. Dr. Quyet joined up with us after the 8 or so hour drive to Ha Giang province. There was another considerable drive through stunning limestone karst scenery and multiple stops to meet officials and get permits checked, and then we were ready to enter Khau Ca. It's an approximately two hour hike up to the camp which homes the seven or so rangers who monitor the monkeys. We had a brief hike up into the forest in the afternoon to get a feel for the forest and as Quyet would tell me later to see if I could actually handle the rather challenging terrain.

The death of the generator on the first night meant the only thing to do was drink the rice wine. Far too much rice wine. Somewhat fortunately we woke to rain the next morning which gave slightly longer to recover. The whole day ended up being a washout. Stump-tailed macaques are also present but rarely seen. The second day we climbed back up. The sharp limestone and constant threat of doing an ankle certainly kept us on our toes. Tan came within millimetres of neutering himself after one particular unfortunate slip. The second day was uneventful in terms of wildlife as we split into three separate teams each with a walkie talkie should we find anything. We came back a bit battered and bruised but thankful for the improved weather.

Third day we got our first sighting as we came across a group right on the crest of a hill but the only sight was the ludicrous tail and a pair of buttocks disappearing into the foliage. We waited for hours thinking they may return with one of the ranger teams on the opposite side of the valley they didn't really seem to have anywhere to go but they never returned.



Fourth day was more hiking, and got to see some stunning scenery as the mist came rolling down the valleys. But no monkeys.

The following day we knew would realistically be the last chance as a large storm was coming in for what should have been the final day. The rangers went out very early this morning much earlier than Quyet and I. Luc had had to depart and Tan stayed at camp. We hiked our way back up and then after a couple of hours or so there came some chatter through the walkie talkie. I didn't want to get my hopes up but after quite a long and crackly conversation that I understood none of, Quyet told me the rangers had spotted some a couple of valleys over. It was at this point I made the mistake of asking how far away, rather than how long it would take to get there and got super excited about some imminent Snub-nosed monkey action. The next two hours or so hours of painstakingly slow progress was pretty agonizing. It is pretty much impossible to move with any speed through that forest. I'm grateful Quyet didn't have the fit of rage my constant 'are we there yet' excited badgering probably warranted.



And then they were there, two Tonkin-snub monkeys leaping through the mist down the valley. Then rest of the group circled behind and disappeared into the forest. It was raining again now and thoroughly satisfied we were discussing about going back (traversing that terrain in the dark was not something I would like to do) when Zhoi, one of the rangers motioned there was movement up ahead. We scaled the side of the cliff, and sat up in the canopy was a female with her baby. Then two males, one a huge fuzzy beast, which was my dream sighting, and another younger one. The males disappeared after about thirty minutes and we just sat with the female and baby for over an hour before the rain got heavier and the mist rolled in.



That night the idea of going back up the mountain in the rain the following day had lost some of its allure. And with the chances of the monkeys hanging

around after having seen us yesterday very slim, Quyet floated the idea of going down a day early and taking the drive to Van Long for the Delacor's langur.



The next day was a travel day and we stayed in a hotel close by the Park. The following day we went in twice, once in the morning with no langurs spotted and in the evening around five-ish when we saw some very very high individuals. We tried one more time the following morning before heading back to Hanoi and were rewarded with a big male sat no more than 3 metres from our raft, stuffing his face with leaves, right by the water's edge.



The cherry on the cake we departed to Hanoi and said our goodbyes. Or at least until I can get a permit for cao vit gibbons.

