

Report for Mammalwatching.com by Nick Brierley (Adventure Alternative Borneo) & Shavez Cheema (1StopBorneo Wildlife)

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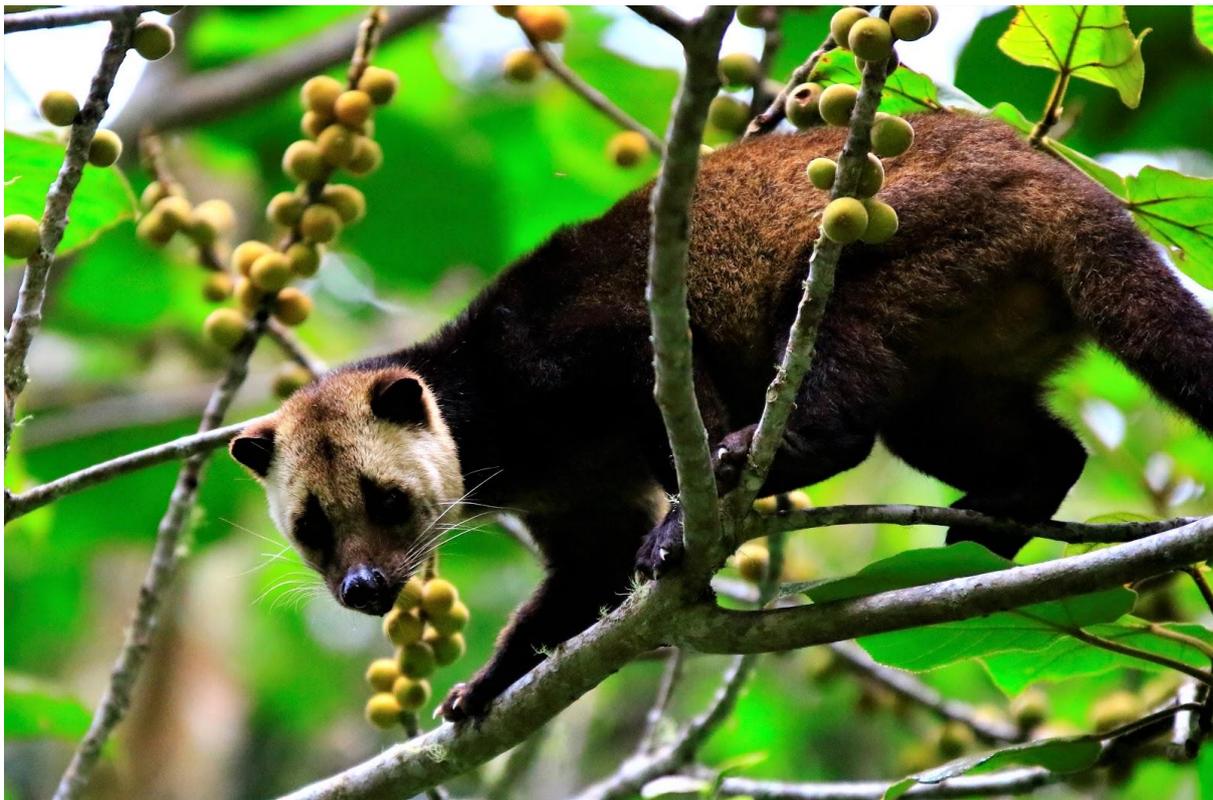
August 10th - Sept 11th 2020

Though this is a mammal report, I've added a few important bird and reptile sightings in it too.

After months of lockdown here in Borneo, where going to the local shop was a mission to avoid the military, Malaysia lifted the MCO (movement control order) and the parks were allowed to open their doors (well, gates) again so we decided to take advantage of the lack of tourists and the reduced price of entrance fees. We literally dusted off our cameras and made our way down to the south of Sabah.

First stop; The Crocker Range (Trus Madi). This particular place is world famous for its entomology (which didn't disappoint) but we wanted to explore the area for mammals and birds. Birding was made easy due to the amount of insects, and the short tailed macaques also enjoyed feasting on the dying moths and cicadas every morning.

Mammal watching was a little tougher. We were out day and night, walking and driving but luck wasn't on our side. Civets were everywhere, it was crazy, I'd like to rename the area Musang Range; Musang meaning civet in Malay. Smaller squirrels were pretty common most mornings but we were very surprised with the lack of flying and giant squirrels.



The camera traps proved to be more successful with 1 sun bear sighting, a couple of short tailed mongoose sightings and a Bornean Porcupine.

The highlight of the trip actually happened on our departure day. It was 10.30am and we were chatting in the 4wd with our cameras packed away and then we spotted a marble cat sitting on the dirt road. Rookie mistake! We never packed our cameras away again after that.

Sightings:

Marbled cat - Jentik's squirrel - Bulwer's pheasant - Sun bear - Samba deer - Mouse deer - Yellow muntjac - Bearded pig - Yellow throated marten - Flying fox - Slender shrew - Borneo flying frog - Tufted ground squirrel - Prevost squirrel - Whitehead's squirrel - Brooke's squirrel - Pigtail macaque - Bornean porcupine - short tailed mongoose - Red leaf monkey - Masked civet - Malay civet - Banded civet - Bornean striped palm civet - Plantain squirrel - Wreathed hornbill - Rhinoceros hornbill - Helmeted hornbill

After 6 nights at Trus madi we continued south to Tawau Hills National Park.

Tawau hills is probably the most underrated park in all of Sabah. Its location and quality of rooms probably plays a major role in this. The park HQ is well looked after and the trails/paths are well maintained, I just wish they looked after the rooms as well as the surrounding areas. The rivers running through the park are clean and crystal clear and are safe enough to swim in.

Tawau consists of mainly primary rainforest and is home to some of the tallest tropical trees in the world and rare, endemic orchids. Fig trees are everywhere in the park which makes hornbill viewing especially easy. 6 out of the 8 species are found here regularly and consistently.

There is a resident troop of North Bornean gibbons near accommodation and red leaf monkeys are unfazed and easily viewed throughout the day almost every day also at the accommodation.

The Bornean bay cat is said to be here but has only been spotted on camera traps a couple of times.

We recently spotted the Clouded leopard just behind the accommodation (see picture) .



Just an hour drive from Tawau is a plantation which has resident Bornean pygmy elephants. These elephants happily co exist with the workers in the plantation. Read more about this particular plantation here https://www.nss.org.sg/articles.aspx?art_id=EMwgszsbkVg=

We also did a few night drives around tawau in forested regions not to far from town such as the 'Peak' and near Tawau Golf clubs and it produced very favourable results such as of flying squirrels and there is much more potential here.

We also took a boat out to Wallace bay where we were lucky enough to spot the Irrawaddy dolphin and the Indo-pacific humpbacked dolphin. After watching these beautiful cetaceans we explored the estuary and saw plenty of Proboscis monkeys plus Storm's stork, Lesser adjutant and frigate birds for all you birders out there :)



Sightings:

Clouded leopard - Irrawaddy dolphin - Humpbacked dolphin - Proboscis monkeys - North Bornean gibbon - Red leaf monkey - Leopard cat - Sunda skunk - Hose's pygmy shrew (world's smallest mammal) - Jentik's flying squirrel - Bornean pygmy elephant - Bulwer's pheasant - Samba deer - Mouse deer - Bearded pig - Yellow throated marten - Flying fox - Pangolin (roadkill) - Philipne slow loris - Bornean Colugo - Long tailed porcupine - Banded civet - Borneo flying frog - Moonrat - Blood python - Reticulated python - Long tail macaque - short tailed macaque - Thomas flying squirrel - Red giant flying squirrel - Black flying squirrel - Large sunda tree mouse - Whitehead's squirrel - Prevosts squirrel - Giant squirrel - Spiny rat - Ranee mouse - Small clawed otter - Short tailed mongoose - Malay civet - Palm civet - Striped palm civet - Bornean pygmy squirrel - Bornean shrew - Rhinoceros hornbill - Helmeted hornbill - Wreathed hornbill - Wrinkled hornbill - Black hornbill - Bushy crested hornbill - White crowned hornbill - Tufted ground squirrel - Crested fireback.

After a successful 3 week trip in Tawau we headed east to Bukit Piton. Bukit Piton has no accommodation so it was a quick 2 hour 4wd safari stop over.

Within 15 minutes we spotted our first Orangutan at the roadside. He was a young male and wasn't best pleased with our intrusion. We quickly moved on. No other mammals were spotted as it was 2pm but had great sightings of the Rhinoceros hornbill, Wrinkled hornbill, Wreathed hornbill, Black hornbill, Pied hornbill and Bushy crested hornbill. We spotted 1 more Orangutan but at a distance.

It was a very successful 2 hour trip.

We will be heading back soon to do night drives.

We also visited a place called Luasong, together with Ikea they have spent the last 20 years replanting the logged forest. With much success they now would like to open their doors to visitors but unfortunately I think their prices are very unrealistic and will put off any potential visitors.

The only accommodation is a recently renovated male and female dorm. It's very clean and tidy with shared bathrooms and the food was outstanding but I don't think it's enough to justify sending people there as all the birds and mammals we saw can be found elsewhere a lot easier.

The highlight was seeing the elephants in the palm oil plantations before entering the reserve but these can be seen at a place closer to Tawau.

Sightings:

Beard pigs - Malay civet - Thomas flying squirrel - black flying squirrel - Sambar Deer-Long tailed porcupine-Mangrove cat snake-Rhinoceros Hornbill-Black Hornbill- White bellied Woodpecker-Banded Civet-Palm Civet-Slow Loris- Black Flying Squirrel-Greater and Lesser mouse deers- Flying fox-Brown Wood owl and Borneo Elephant

