

Sabah, April 30 – May 8, 2019

VLADIMIR DINETS

This was a family trip; we visited Mt. Kinabalu and Sepilok, but had only very short time at each location, plus one evening in Kota Kinabalu. I'll mention the lodges we stayed in because they both proved excellent for stays with a 4 year old child. I saw only 56 mammal species.

Mt. Kinabalu was one of Asia's prime mammalwatching locations when I first visited it 17 years earlier, but things have changed. The best trail (Mempening Trail), where I saw a **Hose's civet**, a **Malay weasel**, and an almost certain **black shrew** in 2002 and where Paul Carter saw a **marbled cat**, is now blocked by landslides on both ends. Day permits for Summit Trail have been abolished in 2015, so to get above 1890 m you have to pay for a summit climbing permit, accommodation in one of the huts, obligatory guide's services, and insurance; the total cost reminds you of Kilimanjaro and the guides reportedly rush you to the summit and back, so you spend half the time above 2800 m where mammals are very scarce. There is a path around Timpohon Gate (starting from the toilet building), so you can still enter/exit Summit Trail from around 21:00 until 05:00. I went there for one night of spotlighting and saw a few animals between 2100 and 2300 m: a **Kinabalu ferret-badger**, a **masked palm civet** (Bornean ssp. *ogilbyi*), two **spotted giant flying squirrels** (Bornean ssp. *banksi*), a mid-size cat that was probably a **marbled cat**, but wasn't seen well enough to be sure, and a minuscule shrew that could only be a **Sunda shrew**. If you'd like to climb higher to look for **Kinabalu rat** and diurnal endemics such as **Kinabalu shrew**, **southern smooth-tailed treeshrew**, **red langur**, **Kinabalu** and **Jentink's squirrels**, and **Bornean mountain maxomys**, I'd recommend camping at one of the side trails (the ones to radio towers are never used by anyone). But don't use the main trail in daytime: you'll be immediately spotted and reported by park-affiliated guides.

There used to be an open-air garbage dump at the last parking spot before Timpohon Gate where in 2002 I saw **Kinabalu ferret-badger** and **pen-tailed treeshrew**, but now the garbage was in a metal shed and the only animals getting in were rats (**Bornean mountain maxomys** as far as I could tell). There were also **Sabah giant rats** of the beautiful masked Kinabalu race (still undescribed) near the gate, one of them hiding in the garbage bin in the gate building. A **masked palm civet** was feeding in a fig tree above the garbage shed on one night.

Another disappointment was that many animals common in Park Headquarters area in 2002 were now difficult to find; I saw a lot less despite having a thermal imager. I found only one **Whitehead's pygmy squirrel** despite much searching and having exact location tips from just a few years ago. **Borneo water shrews** were absent from the river below Silau-Silau Trail, and I didn't see a single **Borneo dwarf gymnure**, **sculptor squirrel**, or **tree mouse**. I think one of the problems was that domestic cats had become abundant; also, street lights now attracted much fewer insects, either because the bulb type had changed or because local insect populations had been depleted. In 2002 street lights were attended every morning by huge mixed parties of green jays, treepeeps, laughingthrushes, squirrels and tree shrews; now there were very few of these

We lived in room #2 in Nepenthes Lodge, conveniently located close to one of the brightest street lights, attended at night by a mountain scops-owl, a few **western bentwings** (Bornean ssp. *macrodens*), **narrow-winged pipistrelles**, and a **Jentink's flying squirrel** (I also saw a pair of the latter near Nature Gallery), and in the morning by **mountain treeshrews** (local ssp. *baluensis*) and **Bornean black-banded squirrels**. **Javan pipistrelles** (Sundaic ssp. *javanicus*) roosted under the balcony roof. A barred eagle-owl lived near the park entrance, and once we saw it with a wiggling **mountain sundamys** in its talons. Mammals still common on surrounding trails were **Everett's ground squirrel**, **Horsefield's flying squirrel** (Bornean ssp. *thomsoni*), **Bornean fruit bat** (try also Power Station Rd.), and **red muntjac** (try Bukit Ular Trail).

I found a hollow tree on Bukit Ular Trail ~300 m from its lower end that had a bat roost, very high above a small opening 1 m from the ground (there were larger openings ~15 m up). Bat detector

showed horseshoe bats echolocating at 85-89 and 49-50 kHz. I could only look inside using a dental mirror, and could vaguely see lighter-and darker-colored bats, but my daughter could squeeze her head into the opening and confirmed that there were small grey bats with grey faces and larger dark ones with black faces, presumably **acuminate horseshoe bats** and rare **Francis's horseshoe bats**.

We visited Poring Hot Springs only in daytime and didn't do much hiking; there were a few **lesser false vampires** (local ssp. *kinabalu*) and one **woolly horseshoe bat** (Bornean ssp. *foetidus*) in an old concrete building along the main trail in the Tropical Garden.

In Ranau, watch for **long-winged tomb bats** (Bornean ssp. *albipinnis*) flying at dusk above the traffic circle with giant lettuce statue (on the main road).

Sepilok is famous as the best primary dipterocarp forest left anywhere in the world; it also has an excellent network of trails and a canopy walkway.

We stayed in My Nature Resort on the edge of the forest; it has an observation platform where you can watch **red giant flying squirrels** (light-tailed ssp. *rajah*) every evening, while **Malayan slit-faced bats** (Sundaic ssp. *tragata*) hover around the lights and **bare-rumped sheath-tails** (Sundaic ssp. *saccolaimus*) circle overhead. **Sunda slow loris** (yellow ssp. *menangensis*) visit the grounds regularly (ask the staff for recent sightings). **Prevost's squirrels** (black red-bellied ssp. *pluto*) are abundant, and **plaintain squirrels** (Sabah ssp. *dilutus*) show up sometimes. **Crab-eating** (Sunda ssp. *fascicularis*) and **pig-tailed** (ssp. *nemestrina*) **macaques** visit every couple days; they and **Borneo orangutans** (Sabah ssp. *morio*) are also easy to see in nearby Orangutan Rehabilitation Center at feeding times. The resort has a short loop boardwalk where I saw a **large treeshrews** (of rare and very local ssp. *kretami*) during the day and **black-capped fruit bat**, **Hose's pygmy flying squirrel**, **red spiny maxomys** (Bornean ssp. *bandahara*), and **lesser mouse deer** at night. From the loop you can continue onto a dirt road leading into an oil palm plantation where **Malayan field rats** (Bornean ssp. *jalorensis*) and **Whitehead's maxomys** (Bornean ssp. *whiteheadi*) were very common.

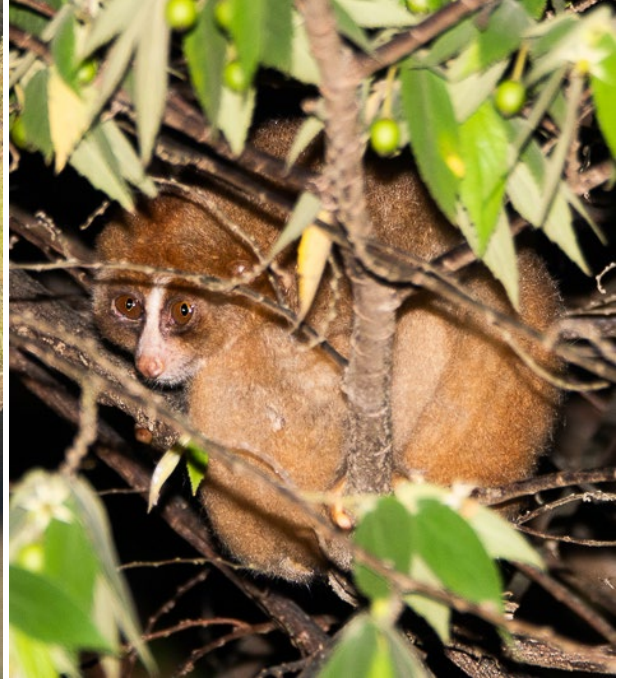
About half an hour away (by car) is Labuk Bay Sanctuary where you can see habituated **proboscis monkeys** and **silvered langurs** (Sabah ssp. *cristatus*), plus **least pipistrelles** (Bornean ssp. *nitidus*) roosting under the building roof at Platform B.

An excellent network of trails starts from Rainforest Discovery Center; one trail goes for 9 km and ends deep in the mangroves. I had only half a night there and saw **black-capped fruit bats** (Bornean ssp. *dysae*), a **coppery sprite** (night-roosting in Hornbill Tower), **Ridley's myotis** (day-roosting under *Birds of Borneo's Lowland and Hill Rainforests* poster in Drongo House), **lesser mouse deer**, **Temmink's flying squirrel** (Bornean ssp. *setosus*), **Tajuddin's maxomys** (on Pitta Trail), **dark-tailed tree rat** (Bornean ssp. *kina*, also on Pitta Trail), and **Bornean porcupine** (on Kingfisher Trail). During the day there were **agile gibbons** (Sabah ssp. *funereus*; heard only), **Prevost's squirrels**, **pale giant squirrels** (darker ssp. *sandakanensis*), and one very tame **sun bear** (Bornean ssp. *euryopilus*; it had probably been at the nearby Sun Bear Rehabilitation Center at some point) at Pitta Trail. Canopy Walkway is said to be great for **red giant flying squirrels** at dusk and for **black flying squirrels** at nightfall. Other animals said to be commonly seen at night are **moonrat**, **western tarsier**, **Sunda skunk**, and **bearded pig**.

Unfortunately, we had to leave Sepilok after just two days due to our daughter's illness (not travel-related), so I couldn't explore it properly.

Kota Kinabalu has become much less unpleasant since 2002. Just 15 min by car from the airport, Tanjung Aru Beach had some nice birds as well as **lesser short-nosed fruit bats** (Bornean ssp. *brachyotis*; look in the marshy area ~200 m inland from the beach), **Sody's yellow house bats** (Bornean ssp. *castaneus*; around palm trees), **black rats** (presumably ssp. *tanezumi*), and **ricefield rats** (along the edge of the beach).

A few photos



Mountain tree shrew (*Tupaia montana baluensis*) and Sunda slow loris (*Nycticebus coucang menagensis*)



Silvered langurs (*Trachypithecus cristatus cristatus*)



Proboscis monkeys (*Nasalis larvatus*)



Orangutang (*Pongo pygmaeus morio*)



Sun bear (*Helarctos malayanus euryspilus*) and Ridley's myotis (*Myotis ridleyi*)



Bornean fruit bats (*Aethalops aequalis*) and lesser false vampires (*Megaderma spasma kinabalu*)



Lesser mouse deer (*Tragulus kanchil*)



Kinabalu squirrel (*Callosciurus baluensis*) and Prevost's squirrel (*C. prevostii pluto*)



Bornean black-banded squirrels (*C. orestes*)



Everett's ground squirrels (*Sundasciurus everetti*)



Pale giant squirrel (*Ratufa affinis sandakanensis*) and spotted giant flying squirrel (*Petaurista elegans banksi*)



Red giant flying squirrels (*P. petaurista rajah*)



Sabah giant rat (*Leopoldamys sabanus*, undescribed ssp.) and mountain sundamys (*Sundamys infraluteus*, caught by barred eagle-owl *Bubo sumatranus tenuifasciatus*)