

Vietnam: Cat Tien NP, 12th -16th March 2020

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View from Forest Floor Lodge

What should have been a three week journey in Annam from Cat Tien through the highlands to Bach Ma was truncated – like a lot of other people’s trips – by the CoVid1-19 crisis. With national parks and tourist areas in Vietnam shutting down and routes home beginning to be closed off, I bailed out after my first site.

Logistics

In early 2020, UK residents could apply for an online visa for stays of over 15 days (which was very efficient, or obtain a visa on arrival. Who knows what the logistics will be in future though?!

I stayed at [Forest Floor Lodge](#) (FFL) a somewhat expensive option by Vitenamese standards but great nonetheless; I stayed in a ‘safari tent’ overlooking the river. It is closer to the ‘good’ forest, however this probably doesn’t matter most of the time. On arrival I was surprised to be identified by fellow mammalwatching.com-mers Curtis Hart & Lindsay Gedacht who were staying at the park headquarters – it was excellent to be able to team up for a number of excursions.

Transfers to and from Ho Chi Minh airport were arranged through the lodge.

Wildlife watching

Cat Tien has been well covered by several excellent reports on mammalwatching.com, so I’ll only note a few changes. A lot of roadside forest between FFL and the HQ has been cleared back several metres to make it look ‘nicer’ – he mind boggles! We thought that this might limit sightings, however the birding was great and a few nice mammals were located. Essentially though, this is largely bamboo dominated young secondary scrub, and not much good for langurs and gibbons. To get into the tall primary forest, you would need to head along the Dac Lua road into the park towards Crocodile Lake, or along the track past Heaven’s Rapids towards Da Co. The latter is easily reachable on foot from FFL (around an hour’s walking, pre-dawn), and was superb for both mammaling and birding. The alternatives are to arrange for someone to drive you from HQ (expensive, as designed

for large groups) or cycle. However, the bikes from the HQ are by all accounts generally awful, and it's not possible to pick one up prior to 6.30am – dawn was around 06.00 when I was there. FFL were a lot more flexible and the bikes in slightly better condition: they didn't mind me returning one at 7.30pm, nor arranging to take one pre-dawn.

Another potentially interesting area is the grasslands which start about 3.5km along the road to Ta Lai from HQ. I cycled down from FFL and stayed in the watchtower at [11.404700,107.391500](#) until dark, before making my way back after dark. Gaur can be seen here at times, as well as good birds like Green Peafowl but the viewing was somewhat tricky with lots of scrubby vegetation. Along with Curtis and Lindsay I took one of the park night drives, which seem to always cover the same area, just after dusk. This excursion was pretty basic and we only recorded common species, but another drive left on our return which could conceivably have been better.

There are other potentially-productive open areas further along this track which I didn't visit.

According to James at FFL (an inexhaustible source of info on mammals and reptiles), the park gibbon tours are pretty poor. They no longer visit the area near the gibbon sanctuary on the island across from the lodge, and don't give you long with the animals. Instead he recommended going to the same areas as the tour, where the gibbons are semi-habituated – current details below, but best to check at the time of your visit.

According to staff at the lodge, Oriental Small-clawed Otters are regular in the river there, and I would probably at least hear them; no sign during my visit, despite checking using the thermal imager.

Species recorded

(List follows "A Field Guide to the Mammals of South-east Asia" by C.M. Francis)

Northern Treeshrew *Tupaia belangeri* – Seen once along the Giant Tung Tree trail between The HQ & FFL. Entrance to this nice trail network is at [11.4301498,107.4273704](#).



Northern Slender-tailed Treeshrew *Dendrogale murina* – This quite lovely species can probably be found in any area of decent forest giant bamboo – I encountered it on three days by hearing movement or calls at the side of the tracks. A few seen along the Da Co track (especially just before Heaven's Rapids), and between FFL & the HQ.

[short-nosed fruit bat *Cynopterus* sp. – a couple seen around FFL]

[Other bats: a few of medium-large microbat were often seen foraging along tracks after dark but I never bothered to get the detector out! Generally very few bats seen.]

Pygmy Slow Loris *Nycticebus pygmaeus* – Seen c800m along the Heaven's Rapids trail on 14th and c1.2km west of Forest Floor Lodge along the main road on 15th, both at around 10.30pm.

Annamese Slivered Langur *Trachypithecus [germaini] margarita* – Excellent (though somewhat brief) views of a skittish group of 3-4 early on the morning of 14th, c600m towards Da Co from Heaven's Rapids. Not seen subsequently. This is apparently one of only a couple of accessible groups within the park, with another sometimes seen along the Dac Lua road beyond (north of) the Crocodile Lake trailhead.



Black-shanked Douc *Pygathrix nigripes* – A group seen just south of Heaven's Rapids on 14th & 16th, and several more north of the Crocodile Lake trailhead on 15th. A superb looking monkey and a trip highlight; views were much better than my phonescoped pics suggest).

Northern Pig-tailed Macaque *Macaca leonina* – Three seen just beyond Heaven's Rapids on 16th.

Long-tailed Macaque *Macaca fascicularis* – Several groups seen between HQ and Heaven's Rapids.

Buff-cheeked Gibbon *Nomascus gabriellae* – Three seen sleeping in trees close to HQ on 14th, then seen well singing at dawn c3km along the Dac Lua Road west of FFL on 15th. Regularly heard vocalising in the mornings; the most reliable place at the time of my visit was close to the Giant Tung Tree ([11.430077 107.427634](#)) at first light - 05.45am in early March. I heard them here a little later in the morning.

Common Palm Civet *Paradoxurus hermaphroditus* – Seen close to the campsite south of HQ after dark on 13th, and two in the grasslands on a night drive on 14th.

Asian Leopard Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis* – One walking along the Dac Lua road c1.75km west of FFL at around 11pm on 15th.

Eurasian Wild Pig *Sus scrofa* – A sounder disturbed from the trackside close to Heaven's Rapids on 14th just before dawn was somewhat unnerving. Another in the grasslands that evening.

Lesser Mousedeer *Tragulus kanchil* – Seen just shortly after dark at the east edge of the grasslands on 13th, then on nightwalks between the HQ and FFL and along Heaven's Rapids track (two) on 14th.

Sambar *Rusa unicolor* – Very common around the grasslands, and a few seen along the Heaven's Rapids track after dark on 14th. As with elsewhere in southeast Asia (but unlike much of India), crepuscular and nocturnal here.

Pallas's Squirrel *Callosciurus erythraeus* – Very common.

[**Cambodian Striped Squirrel** *Tamiops rudolphii* – I only saw one *Tamiops*, at FFL. The view was a bit brief to be sure but I think it was this species rather than *T. maritimus*]

Indochinese Ground Squirrel *Menetes berdmorei* – Two separate animals crossing the Dac Lua road on 15th & two together in the open regenerating forest at the start of the Heaven's Rapids track on 16th.

Berdmore's Rat *Berylmys berdmorei* – The same two animals seen in the forest c800m along the Dac Lua road from FFL on 12th & 15th. Large, greyish terrestrial rats with all dark tails.

[**Malayan Porcupine** *Hystrix brachyura* – prints found on the Heaven's Rapids track]

[Other rodents: several small-medium terrestrial *Maxomys* type rats seen on night walks in the forest, and one arboreal species seen briefly.

A small arboreal mouse was seen twice in the tangles at FFL – on behaviour and range the only species that matches is Indomalayan Pencil-tailed Tree-mouse, but I've seen that and this looked very different to me. One for future visitors to look for!]



The view from my tent and a friendly local at Forest Floor Lodge.