



## **Philippines 2020**

Curtis & Lindsay Hart

We visited the Philippines from February 9th to March 9th, in the early days of Covid19. We knew it would likely be an issue, but it wasn't yet. This is where we saw the first widespread temperature taking and such, masks were not mandatory yet.

We started on Bohol, where we stayed at Habitat Bohol. We visited Raja Sikatuna NP every day and also convinced the guides to take us to some bat caves and flying fox roosts. Some of the caves were not visitable due to some kind of armed rebels. The park wants you to take their guides for everything, however, they are not available until after prime birding hours. We just entered and paid for the guide and entry fee on exit. They were apparently annoyed by this, but did not complain to us. There is an option to stay in the park, which I think would have helped. The guide who Jon Hall used no longer works for Habitat Bohol. According to someone there, he now works for one of the tarsier experience places, and has captured most of the tarsiers around Habitat Bohol. Their current guide was not able to find one.

We then traveled to Cebu to go diving in Malapascua and Moalboal. We only saw one pod of dolphins during this time, but the diving was well worth it. The Thresher Sharks were a big highlight.

The next part of the trip we flew into Coron City to go for Dugongs and squirrels. Calamian Deer can sometimes be seen on the beach during the Dugong trip or by visiting the Calauit Game Preserve and Wildlife Sanctuary. The game preserve seemed really expensive for seeing an average looking deer, so we didn't do it. We had plans to take the ferry to try for Culion Squirrel, but the day we had available was a Sunday which

didn't have enough ferries running to make it worth it.

We then headed down to the northern end of Palawan, where we did a couple of the standard boat tours. We then visited the Palawan Underground River. There are a lot of bats, but they are hard to ID as the boat goes at a basically set speed. Outside of Sabang Beach, there is a known birding site called the ATV trails. If you walk out of town, they are between 1-2 k on the left. This is where I saw most of the mammals I found on Palawan.

**Dugong** (*Dugong dugon*) We went with Dugong Divers to snorkel with the Dugong. Diving was an option, but much more expensive. The site we went to has a Dugong that does not mind people when there is good visibility. Each group of 4 is allowed 20 minutes in the water with the Dugong. In my opinion, if you can free dive to about 7 M, it is better to snorkel. We were the first boat at the mooring, and a Dugong was sleeping below it. It moved off as we were getting ready and we were allowed to get in before the divers to help refind it. I found it and our time did not start until the divers arrived, giving us close to 40 minutes. The other good thing about snorkeling is that when the Dugong goes up to breath, you get to see it at the surface, where the divers just have to watch from below, and follow it when it comes back down. After our time was up, we moved to another site that was supposed to have a 50% chance of seeing another Dugong. We did not, but the visibility was over 50 m and there were lots of Green Turtles and decent coral.

**Palawan Treeshrew** (*Tupaia palawanensis*) We saw one pretty close on the ATV trails the morning that we went there.

**Philippine Flying Lemur** (*Cynocephalus volans*) We saw 8 over three days and a total of 16 hours in the forest at Raja Sikatuna NP. They show up very well with a thermal imager.

**Crab-eating Macaque** (*Macaca fascicularis*) Pretty common in the clearing of Raja Sikatuna NP, as they were fed. We saw several at some of the El Nido and Coron tour sites. There were a few at the Underground River, and a large group at the ATV trails.

**Palawan Flying Squirrel** (*Hylopetes nigripes*) I found one on the ATV trails. We spent three evenings for a total of about 5 hours spotlighting there.

**Philippine Pygmy Squirrel** (*Exilisciurus concinnus*) I found two, about 20 m apart, 50 m from me. I found them with the thermal imager. 16 hours of effort, over three mornings. They seemed to be feeding on the open trunks of larger trees.

**Busuanga Squirrel** (*Sundasciurus hoogstraali*) This species was very common. They were easy to see on the paved section of the driveway to The River House. There were also a few calling and displaying around the parking lot of the hot springs near Coron just before it opened.

**Northern Palawan Tree Squirrel** (*Sundasciurus juvencus*) I saw this species on 7 Commando Beach and at the ATV trails. It was very common on the ATV trails.

**Philippines Tree Squirrel** (*Sundasciurus philippensis*) We found one pair that was foraging together in Raja Sikatuna NP on Bohol.

**Palawan Pencil-tailed Tree Mouse** (*Chiropodomys calamianensis*) I saw one at night at

the ATV trails.

**Sunda Short-nosed Fruit Bat** (*Cynopterus brachyotis*) I normally won't ID a bat on the wing, however this is the only *Cynopterus* on Palawan and I could see the white on the wings. There were a few flying around the road on the walk back from the ATV trails.

**Island Flying Fox** (*Pteropus hypomelanus*) I was taken to a large flying fox roost by the staff at Habitat Bohol, there were at least a few in the colony.

**Large Flying Fox** (*Pteropus vampyrus*) I was taken to a large colony by staff from Habitat Bohol.

**Diadem Leaf-nosed Bat** (*Hipposideros diadema*) I visited a cave that had about 15 of this species on Bohol. There were also hundreds in the Underground River.

**Small Asian Sheath-tailed Bat** (*Emballonura alecto*) We found a few of these in small caves visible from the trails in Rajah Sikatuna Park.

**Little Long-fingered Bat** (*Miniopterus australis*) There were a few in caves that were near the trail in Raja Sikatuna NP that were small enough they could only have been this species.

**Spinner Dolphin** (*Stenella longirostris*) A pod of around 25 went by at dusk, as we were eating dinner in Moalboal.



