

Borneo – Sabah October 22 – November 4, 2022

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Golden-naped Barbet

This trip was conceived and planned mere weeks ahead of time, thus preparation was rather rushed and neither of us felt anywhere near as up-to-snuff on the local birdlife as we would have liked having had little to no time to study the bird sounds, field guides etc. However, it was an incredibly enjoyable trip and as first time visitors to Sabah we were impressed and pleasantly surprised at the ease of travel and quality of tourism infrastructure available, seemingly across all price ranges.

With the limited time available to us we decided to go for a rather straightforward itinerary, visiting the three principal birding areas of Mount Kinabalu, Kinabatangan River and Danum Valley together while I spent an additional day and a half at the Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Centre after Jukka headed home.

Our eBird trip report/all lists can be found here:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/88092?welcome=true>

Logistics

Mount Kinabalu: From the Kota Kinabalu airport we took a 3 hour taxi ride (fixed rate of 190MYR) to the D'Villa Hotel, 500m past the Mount Kinabalu Park HQ. Afternoon traffic was very slow coming out of KK. We were recommended to stay at the D'Villa Hotel and it served our purposes though was probably a bit overpriced for what it was at 180MYR/night (simple room with 2 beds and hot water shower, shared between the two of us). Food was alright and the staff were friendly and spoke okay English. Birding the park was simple with a 4km road up to Timpohon Gate providing easy (though the road is a pretty steady climb) birding while several trails provided more quiet and secluded options, as well as a few leeches. Taxis can be taken from the park HQ (or flagged down along the road) to take you up to the end of the road or back down and should cost 5MYR/pp, though perhaps more if there is only one or two of you. Transport to other locations such as Sandakan, Kota Kinabalu etc., at a moderately stiff price, can be arranged through Kiosk 4 at the Visitor Centre at the park entrance. We took this option for our transfer to Sukau (Kinabatangan River, 6hr drive) for 700MYR rather than try to deal with busses and unknown transport options from Sukau Junction to Sukau itself.

D'Villa Hotel on whatsapp: +60 13-863 8800

Kinabatangan River: As per seemingly most other independent birders, we contacted local guide Romzi and we were very pleased with his services. He charged us 400MYR/day/person and this included a morning and afternoon boat ride. A nighttime boat cruise cost 50MYR/pp, a very reasonable rate as we were out for at least 2.5hrs. For an afternoon visit to Gomantong Caves (30 minute drive) he charged an additional 70MYR for driving us there in his personal vehicle.

We arranged our accommodation at the Menanggol B&B through Romzi as well. The B&B is run by his sister-in-law and while basic is friendly, serves good food and is a reasonable rate at 100MYR/pp/night including 3 meals.

Romzi was able to arrange a transfer for us in a private vehicle to Lahad Datu (2hrs from Sukau) for 250MYR.

Romzi on whatsapp: +60 11-3152 1176

Danum Valley Field Centre: It took a while to actually find the contact info for the DVFC office in Lahad Datu. After initially getting all-inclusive quotes from a couple tour agencies (~2500MYR/pp) I finally got ahold of the office itself and was able to arrange a basic package that only included transport to/from the DVFC from Lahad Datu, accommodation in the Hostel and dinner (we assumed we would be out birding during other meal times). This cost me 1638MYR for 4 nights and Jukka slightly less for three nights including private transport, as it

was a Tuesday, back to Lahad Datu (350MYR). Scheduled transports occur on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, cost 85MYR and leave Lahad Datu at 15:00 and DVFC at 08:30.

The DVFC buildings are rather spread out with the Hostel being about a 7-10 minute walk from the Dining Hall and 5 minute walk from Reception. The hostel has male and female quarters, each has 48 beds separated into smaller “rooms” with two bunk beds in each. The front of each “room” has a curtain that can be drawn across for some privacy. There are ceiling fans over the corridor running down the length of the hostel room but it was quite hot during the first part of the night. There are two kitchens, each with cooking facilities and small fridges as well as covered dining areas.

Trails for the most part were not particularly well maintained though suitable for most people. We did have trouble finding the right trail the one morning we aimed for the Tembaling Waterfall trail, ending up on the Rhino Pool trail instead which ruled out our main shot at Blue-banded Pitta as the upper part of that trail seems to be the most reliable area for this species. Some of the grid trails seem to hardly be in existence (for example I couldn’t see any trail leading north from W10). Trails are supposed to only be accessed with a local ranger but we were told there were no bird specific guides and we preferred to find our own birds anyway. We did chat with one ranger who seemed quite knowledgeable about birds though so hiring one for a day could have been a good option in hindsight. At any rate, like other birders before us, nobody on site told us we couldn’t bird the trails on our own.

Danum Valley Field Centre Office on whatsapp: +60 17-823-5638

Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Centre: this is an easy area to bird with a good trail network, canopy walkways and towers and you can walk in at first light and pay for a day pass later (20MYR if I remember correctly). They offer night walks from 18:00-20:00, ask at the ticket office beforehand if they are doing one that night, and on these you can see Flying Squirrels and other night life. I did a little owling on my own and one of the night walk rangers politely informed me that I was to be out of the park by 7pm.

I stayed at the nearby Sepilok B&B, a five minute walk from the RDC. I booked through booking.com and got a room with 4 beds (all that was left) for 285MYR for two nights. Meals were decent though the kitchen keeps fairly short hours around meal times so either pre-order or at the very least be sure to be informed as to what those hours are. You can also get decent, cheap meals at the Keuring Café in the RDC from 09:00 – 17:30.

The bus from Lahad Datu (~3hrs) dropped me off at the Sepilok junction and there were a couple “taxis” (looked like just locals with somewhat beat up cars) waiting on the side of the Sepilok entrance road ready to ferry people to the various hotels nearby.

Daily Accounts

Oct. 22/2022

After landing in Kota Kinabalu around 14:45 we hired a taxi from the taxi booth inside the airport to take us to Mount Kinabalu (190MYR for the ride). We made a quick stop at a grocery store en route to grab breakfasts, snacks and lunch food. Traffic was slow leaving the city and it took us close to 3 hours to complete the drive. We didn't see too many birds from the car but did get Scaly-breasted and Chestnut Munias, Green Imperial Pigeons, White-breasted Woodswallows and I spotted a flyby Black-headed Bulbul and a Long-tailed Shrike out my side of the vehicle. After arriving at Hotel D'Villa we had dinner and Jukka enjoyed a few local moths at the lights before we turned in.

Oct. 23/2022

After a miscalculation on my part as to the anticipated sunrise time we departed the hotel about 05:45 as it was getting light. We had intended to walk up the road towards Timpohon Gate a ways before light but seeing as it was full daylight when we got to park HQ we paid our entrance fee (15MYR/pp) and just started birding.

We were soon on our first Chestnut-headed Laughingthrush, Bornean Whistling Thrush and Temminck's Babbler. Activity was decent as we made our way up the road. Around the Liwagu Restaurant we spotted a male **Black-sided Flowerpecker**, Bornean Treepie and our first Black-capped White-eyes. A nearby small flock had our first Yellow-breasted Warblers, Bornean Whistler and Indigo Flycatcher.

In the general vicinity of the 2km mark (a bit below?) we could hear a mixed flock up ahead. I was a bit ahead of Jukka and when he called out **Whitehead's Spiderhunter** I only got back to him in time to glimpse the bird as it flew away. Unfortunately, this would be our only encounter with this first species of the famous "Whitehead's Trio".



Chestnut-hooded Laughingthrush

Up ahead, the mixed flock we could hear was made up mostly of Sunda and Chestnut-hooded Laughingthrushes but also held a pair of Crimson-winged Woodpeckers (we would see the

similar Checker-throated the next day for a nice comparison), Sunda Cuckooshrike, Black-and-crimson Oriole and the stunning Bornean Green-Magpie. At the lookout we spent a bit of time scanning for Serpent Eagle (or any raptors) without success. The birding slowed a bit but we continued to pick up new birds such as a few Abberant (Sunda) Bush-warblers, a **Bornean Forktail** that walked along the roadside ahead of us and quick views at a female **Bornean Shortwing**.

As we neared the end of the road we spotted a couple Golden-naped Barbets foraging in some fruiting trees about 50m before the public toilets. We then played a bit of call and response with a **Fruit-hunter** before it stopped calling. Returning to the tree we had last seen the Barbets in we promptly found the male Fruit-hunter in it. It didn't stick around for too long though as it flew up past us and across the road. Buoyed by this excellent sighting we were further thrilled



Whitehead's Broadbill

when a stunning male **Whitehead's Broadbill** flew into the closer of the fruiting trees! We enjoyed it to our hearts content as it foraged away even as the light drizzle started turning to proper rain.

After sheltering under the covered of a roofed area near the bathrooms for over an hour we decided to call it quits and flagged down a vehicle that turned out to be a taxi (we found out the pass by fairly regularly) who returned us to our hotel. Rain for the rest of the afternoon put an end to our birding.

Oct. 24/2022

Having found out the day before that the lower gate, just up from the Liwagu Restaurant doesn't open until 07:00 we decided to bird the lower trails for the first hour of the morning in a bid to see partridges/Whitehead's Trogon before catching a taxi up to the Timpohon Gate. The trails were essentially dead. We arrived with a short amount of darkness to try for Mountain Scops-owl/Sunda owl but didn't hear either. Having seen nothing on the lower Liwagu and Silau-Silau trails except a **Bornean Forktail** at the main bridge we finally spotted a female Siberian Blue-Robin behind the Liwagu Restaurant.

Catching a ride with the same taxi driver as the day before, we arrived at the Timpohon Gate to a bit of fog but there was a large mixed flock working the area and we enjoyed our first White-

browed (Blyth's) Shrike-Babbler and Grey-chinned Minivets among other species we had seen the day before. Moving down the road slightly we came across the same flock again but with a pair of Flavescent (Pale-faced) Bulbuls at a fruiting bush and some Grey-throated Babblers. No sign of Mountain Blackeyes alas.



Female Fruit-hunter

On a tip from a local guide we headed to the Bukit Ular trail which was a bit tricky to find as the trail is decommissioned and signage overgrown. The trailhead is beside a small stream at about the 3.2km mark. The first 100m or of the trail were somewhat overgrown but after about 50-70m it crossed a small stream and here we had a very obliging **Bornean Stubtail**. Shortly after this the trail merges onto an old road and becomes wider. We heard a fairly close Red-breasted Partridge that would not come out and neither heard nor saw the hoped for Mountain Wren-babblers. A pair of Snowy-browed Flycatchers and another Stubtail were seen. Backtracking, we finally spotted a female **Whitehead's Trogon** just before coming to the road and it appeared to have an immature bird in tow while Jukka also saw the male! While we didn't find really any leeches elsewhere birding Mount Kinabalu, there were lots along the Bukit Ular trail.

Back on the road we noted a mixed flock of Laughingthrushes moving into the nearby canopy. Though it was misty the distinctive silhouette of **Bare-headed Laughingthrush** came into view and we got passable views a couple times of the 3+ individuals present. As with yesterday, our two best birds of the day had come right around noon.

With just a light misting/drizzle off and on we decided to keep birding our way down the road. Another small flock around the 2km mark contained a surprise female Lesser Cuckooshrike (at one point in view beside the larger, bulkier Sunda Cuckooshrike) as well as a rather brief male **Bornean Leafbird**.

A few hundred metres before arriving at the Liwagu Restaurant we again encountered a group of 3+ **Bare-headed Laughingthrushes** getting better views as we were below the cloud layer now. This group were joined by a few Bornean Green Magpies and a pair of Hair-crested (Bornean) Drongos. By the time we reached the restaurant it was raining proper so we stationed ourselves on the balcony there and enjoyed a snack and beverage in the hopes the rain would taper off. Around 4:25 it did so and we wandered up to look for **Everett's Thrush**

that we had been told regularly feeds beside the road (a bit below the 1.5km mark) in the early morning and afternoon from 4pm onwards. Sure enough, we noticed a slightly wider, grassy margin along the road that looked suitable and there were two of the Thrushes in the mist. They were joined by our only **Eyebrowed Jungle Flycatcher**.

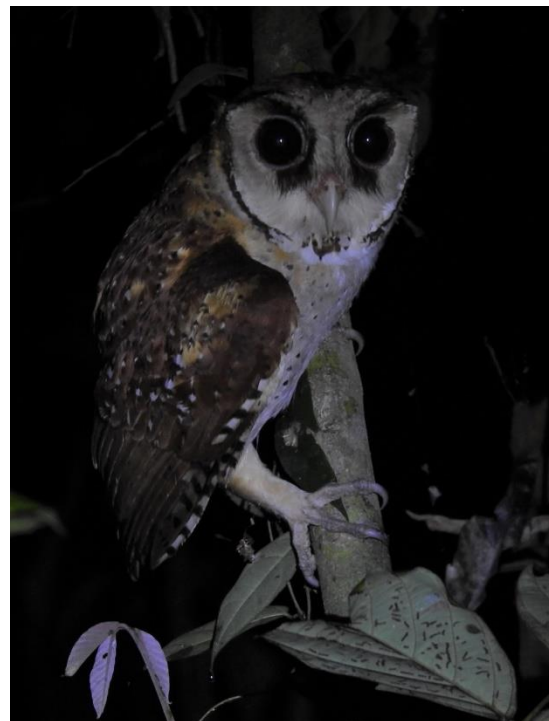
With the very low light and increased drizzle we headed back to the hotel.

Oct. 25/2022

Our final morning at Mount Kinabalu was spent around the park entrance and buildings. At the backside of the parking area and beside the path down to the Balsam Café was a fruiting bush that attracted some very photogenic Golden-naped Barbets. We could also hear a bamboo loving Yellow-bellied Warbler and walking down behind the café we got good looks at it. Carrying on down this road about 75m we suddenly heard a Crimson-headed Partridge (a species we had been hearing lots over the past two days) just upslope. Eventually it wandered into view as we patiently scanned the understory. We ended up getting great looks at it as it even came into a small clearing about 5m from us! A fine way to end our time in the mountains.

As we were still unsure how we were getting to the Kinabatangan River that day we stopped into the visitors centre around 08:30 and within minutes had arranged for one of their drivers to take us to Sukau (6hrs drive). Shortly after 09:00 our ride picked us up from the hotel and we made the uneventful drive, stopping for a very tasty lunch just east of Telupid before arriving at our rendezvous with Romzi in Sukau at 15:15. In short order we were ferried over to the Menanggol B&B (about a 3 minute boat ride) where we spent the afternoon birding the rather confined yard.

Upon arriving at the dock we spotted our first Dusky Broadbills and later on noted White-chested Babbler, Malaysian Pied Fantail and a Brown-throated Sunbird. A pair of White-breasted Waterhens were wandering about at the back of the property as well. Several dozen Swiftlets were apparently roosting/nesting in a small structure on the property and these included some with obvious whitish rumps (White-nest Swiftlets) and others with more uniform, darker upperparts (either Black-nest or Mossy-nest). Over the course of our time on the Kinabatangan river we had ample opportunity to study the Swiftlets and were readily



Oriental Bay Owl

able to pick out the smaller, darker Plume-toed and the pale rumped White-nest but the darker rumped mid-sized swifts remained unidentified, not being certain how to separate Mossy- and Black-nests. Perhaps further study of Jukka's many photos will shed some light on them.

Shortly after it got dark Romzi pointed out a Sunda Colugo (aka "Flying Lemur") on a tree near the accommodation which we even got to see gliding between trees! A Sunda Scops-owl started calling from nearby just as we were called in to dinner. As we had seen this species in Singapore a few days prior we didn't try for it. After dinner we had an excellent night cruise with Romzi in his boat spotting a couple Buffy Fish-owls and several sleeping primates including Long-tailed and Pig-tailed Macaques and Proboscis Monkey, Malay and Philippine Palm Civet. We got a response from **Oriental Bay Owl** and went in after it. We were a bit surprised at how aggressive Romzi was in walking straight in towards where the bird was calling and indeed the bird seemed rather skittish and we ultimately couldn't track it down. Fortunately, we had a second chance later on and this time Romzi walked us right up to the bird in no time, rather vindicating his earlier approach though this bird was certainly more territorial. A Large Frogmouth was heard but wouldn't come out.

Oct. 26/2022

After breakfast we got our first new bird of the day from the B&B; a singing White-crowned Shama. We spent the full morning doing a river cruise with Romzi, visiting a couple tributaries downstream. Early on we enjoyed a fruiting tree full of Little Green Pigeons followed by a large group of their Pink-necked cousins as well as Rhinoceros, Black and Oriental Pied Hornbills. We stopped at a rocky cliff face that had an alcove with a colony of several dozen Plume-toed Swifts nesting in it. Our first **(Bornean) Black Magpie** was seen atop a riverside tree and then in



Sabah Partridge

flight as it carried on along the shore. A lesser Fish-eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle and several Crested Serpent Eagles were spotted before leaving the Kinabatangan for a smaller tributary.

Along the tributaries we got good looks at a Hooded Pitta and had a very accommodating **Sabah (aka Chestnut-necklaced) Partridge** walking back and forth within metres of the prow of the boat as we nosed into shore. Blue-eared

Kingfisher, Black-naped Monarch, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird and Green Iora were spotted before we found another of the area's top targets, our first **Storm's Storks**. While the world population is estimated to be a mere few hundred individuals, this is one of their strongholds and we saw a few pairs over our two and a half days here.

Returning to the main Kinabatangan River late morning we noted a soaring Rufous-bellied Eagle and a lone foraging Whiskered Tern. This was followed by a rather skulky male **Diard's Trogon** that took several minutes for us to actually spot as it called from the densely wooded shore.

In the afternoon we did another river cruise, upstream this time. A trio of **Wrinkled Hornbills** were one of our first new birds of the afternoon and another trio, this time of the sought-after **White-crowned Hornbills** bookended the afternoon just before we started back towards home. In between we saw several new species including **(Bornean) Brown Barbet**,

Long-tailed Parakeet, Black-headed Bulbul, **Dusky Munia** and a responsive female **Malaysian Blue Flycatcher**. Best of all though was when we finally got a response from a pair of **Bornean Ground-cuckoos**. This was my most-wanted species of the trip and they put us through a suspenseful 10 minutes or so before Romzi was finally able to manoeuvre the boat into a place where we could just see the bird through a small window in the vegetation. Fortunately the bird in view stayed put for several minutes before changing perch slightly to a place where Jukka could get a clearer look than he was able to of it on its first perch. In the end we were extremely pleased to have gotten reasonable looks at this elusive bird and we have to give Romzi credit for suggesting that staying in the boat was a better tactic than going onto shore and likely flushing the birds, despite the seemingly impenetrable riverside vegetation.

On the mammal front, we encountered a couple troupes of Proboscis Monkeys, Long-tailed Macaques and in a large tree beside the B&B, some Silver Leaf Monkeys (Langurs) settling in for the night as dusk fell.

Oct. 27/2022

We spent the entirety of our second morning along the Menanggol River, opposite our B&B. One of our first new birds were a trio of Gray-hooded (was Chestnut-winged) Babblers that came in for good looks. A fruiting tree had at least a dozen **(Bornean) Brown Barbets** in it along



Storm's Stork



Proboscis Monkey

with a lone Blue-eared Barbet and a male Lesser Green Leafbird. A little later we encountered pairs of Red-billed and Chestnut-breasted Malkohas foraging in a looks group, both species showing nicely. White-crowned Hornbill was heard but having seen them the previous afternoon we didn't really try for them. Our first Yellow-rumped and Scarlet-backed Flowerpeckers were nice to spot in the riverside vegetation. As the morning reached its end we had a brief view of a pair of flyover Grey-and-buff

Woodpeckers and a soaring Changeable Hawk-eagle.

After lunch we decided that given our success on the waterways we would switch things up and head to Gomantong Caves. While we couldn't access the caves themselves as the bridge to them is under construction (to be completed in 2024 apparently) we enjoyed birding the entrance road near the parking area. On the drive in we spotted our first Wallace's Hawk-eagle. We had no luck with Rufous-collared Kingfisher and a calling Black-crowned Pitta wouldn't budge but we stated noting other birds. A couple Asian Fairy Bluebirds and a female Dark-throated Oriole popped in and out of view. Then a pair of Chestnut-rumped Babblers put on a show, followed by our first Grey-cheeked Bulbul and Verditer Flycatcher. A large lump in a tree up ahead turned out to be our first Orangutan! A female and her young one were feeding quietly on some fruits though the mother had a knack for seeming to stay largely hidden behind the leaves/branches.

As dusk approached we returned to the parking area from where we watched as some swirling groups of bats flew around overhead, chased periodically by up to three different Bat Hawks and a lone Peregrine Falcon.

Oct. 28/2022

Our final morning was spent going upstream and then a short ways down the Tenegang tributary. Early on we stopped to enjoy the swiftlet spectacle around us as we were in the middle of many dozen flying low over the river. Among the Plume-toed, White-nest and the Mossy-/Black-nests we noticed a larger one coming towards us. Passing within 30 feet of us and then swooping low against the near shore we noted the overall dark appearance, lack of paler rump and somewhat longer wings/tail than the Swiftlets; a **Waterfall Swift**! Further along we encountered a half dozen bathing Blue-throated Bee-eaters, a Crested Goshawk and a pair of

Jerdon's Baza. On our way back we would get nice views of one of the latter perched right beside the river. The customary Hornbills were flying back and forth across the river and these included two **Wrinkled Hornbills** as well as another trio of **White-crowned Hornbills**.

At the mouth of the Tenagang we got our first good looks at Stork-billed Kingfisher. A pair of **Malaysian Blue Flycatchers** were spotted and we twice had brief flyover views of a cuckoo that both times landed out of sight. With our time running out before we had to leave for Danum Vallley we left the Tenagang and made a short jaunt further upstream to a place Romzi knew for **Black-crowned Pitta**. Once we'd found a spot to land the boat we were on a calling bird in no time, enjoying its stunning colours as it called from a perch about 3 metres off the ground.



White-crowned Hornbill

After departing from the Menanggol B&B we met up with the private transport that Romzi had arranged for us. It took us about two hours to get to Lahad Datu where we were dropped at the office of the Danum Valley Field Centre. After having lunch at the Red Rose Restaurant (perhaps a fateful decision as we would both start to have stomach issues the following morning) a block from the office we grabbed some breakfast/lunch/snack groceries for our time in the Danum Valley.

Shortly before 15:00 ourselves and the two other guests going to the field centre set off. The 2.5hr drive was pretty uneventful. We did see some reasonably fresh looking elephant sign but this was as close as we'd get to seeing the beasts themselves. After checking in at reception we got settled in to our beds in the dorm and at 7, headed down for dinner at the dining hall. The ~700m walk there and back provided us with a couple nocturnal goodies including frogs, lizards and a Buffy Fish-owl.

Oct. 29/2022

Shortly after it got light we headed out from the Hostel. On our way down to the entrance road we noticed a few Whiskered Treeswifts and an Orangutan getting out of its bed in one of the trees beside the road. We encountered another just after turning on the entrance road as well. There were a few birds about and just after passing the welcome sign we noticed some Black-bellied Malkohas in the canopy. A stocky dark bird flew into the same area and it was immediately apparent we had stumbled upon our first **Bornean Bristleheads**! Over the next 5

minutes or so we enjoyed watching a group of at least a half dozen as they foraged and gave their quirky calls. They were mostly a bit too high in the canopy for good photos but we had spectacular views through the scope and I believe Jukka got some passable shots.

Buzzing from this wonderful encounter we carried on finding our first Rufous Piculet, Hairy-backed Bulbul and a small group of flyover Blue-rumped Parrots. Stepping off the road to peer over the bank paid off as a pair of **Black-capped Babblers** popped up. Some speculative playback for Bornean Banded Pitta elicited a response from the dense undergrowth. The bird sounded a bit off and while it called back for a while it didn't come in. I would later realize that this was because it was actually a Blue-headed Pitta. A calling Diard's Trogon was eventually tracked down at the same spot before we gave up on the Pitta.



Black-bellied Malkoha

We got as far as the regenerating clearing around the old Rhino enclosure. There was no sign of the hoped for Falconets that are sometimes reported from here. We were both starting to feel a bit off (we decided it was likely due to our lunch the day before) and with this lethargy combined with the heating up of the late morning made up our minds for us to start heading back to the Hostel. We got quick views of a female **Great Argus** crossing the road and spotted our first pair of Rufous-winged Philentomas en route. Once back at the hostel I was totally beat and ended up spending the next 18+ hours in bed (minus a couple trips to the bathroom). Jukka was fairing a bit better than I and made it out for some birding in the afternoon.

Oct. 30/2022

Jukka spent the morning out on the west trail in the grid. He encountered another two Bristleheads as well as **Rufous-backed Dwarf Kingfisher**, Maroon Woodpecker and **Bornean Spiderhunter**. I was energetic enough to sit out on the deck and see what birds would pass by in front of me. This was actually moderately productive and I ended up getting good looks at Black-bellied Malkoha, Rufous Piculet, Orange-bellied and **Yellow-rumped Flowerpeckers** and Bornean Spiderhunter that came to feed on the fruiting plants right behind the deck. A small fruiting tree proved very attractive to Bulbuls and I was able to study the subtle differences

between Red-eyed, Charlotte's, **Cream-eyed** (identified properly the following morning) and Spectacled. Meanwhile, a distant Black-winged Flycatcher-Shrike was scope in the canopy.

After lunch (which provided a soaring Oriental Honey-Buzzard) Jukka took a nap and from the deck I added Streaked Bulbul in the same fruiting tree. Later in the afternoon we were both feeling well enough to do a short walk down the Adventure trail. This was not particularly productive with Purple-naped Spiderhunter one of the only birds we saw. We spent dusk enjoying the view of the river from the viewing area between reception and the dining hall. Many swifts were foraging and dropping down to the water to drink and we noted our first Brown-backed Needletail and several Grey-rumped Treeswifts among them.

Oct. 31, 2022

There was some light misty rain early in the morning causing us to bird from the hostel until around 08:00. A similar cast of birds were noted as the day before though better looks were had of the **Cream-eyed Bulbul** and our first Raffle's Malkoha showed up. Yellow-eared and Bornean Spiderhunters also came into the fruiting plant behind the deck several times.



Black-and-yellow Broadbill

Shortly before 08:00, with the clouds burning off we headed out to do the Tembaling Waterfall Trail with the hope of getting Blue-banded Pitta. Unfortunately, the trails were a bit confusing and we seemingly took a wrong turn as we ended up on the Rhino Enclosure trail, paralleling the river. While disappointed that we had fluffed our only chance at the Pitta we still had a nice morning of birding. Before evening crossing the bridge to begin the trail we spotted a few **Bornean Crested Firebacks** who gave us nice looks as the skulked through the undergrowth before flying across the stream. After a bit of a slow start we eventually encountered a proper mixed flock that held Short-tailed, Rufous-fronted, Ferruginous and Scaly-crowned

Babblers, our first Yellow-bellied Bulbul and best of all a stunning **Banded Broadbill**. Moving with this flock, we also got on a fine male **Sunda** (was Large-billed) **Blue Flycatcher**. We encountered several more small flocks of babblers with the same species though we undoubtedly missed a few Rufous-crowned as we just couldn't tell them apart from the very

similar Scaly-crowned and the few we saw properly we confirmed as the latter. Inside the forest, it seems that Spotted Fantail replaces the Malaysian Pied-Fantails that were common in the more open areas along the entrance road and around the buildings. In the late morning, another larger flock held our first **Maroon-breasted Philentoma** and our only Yellow-breasted Flowerpeckers and **White-bellied Erpornis** of the trip. A little further on we flushed a pair of Brown Wood-owls off their roost and we got good looks at one perched in the subcanopy. This was around the point where we realized we were off track so we decided to turn around and start heading back.

The highlight of the walk back was a staked out nesting **Large Frogmouth** that we had been told about.

Back at the hostel by around 14:30 we were greeted by a stunning Blue-and-white Flycatcher that visited a small fruiting bush several times over the next couple hours. As we were both rather tired out we just birded around the hostel, not noting anything new.



Large Frogmouth

Nov. 1, 2022

Our last morning birding together before Jukka had to head home and we were both feeling reasonably well. Again, light rain delayed our start an hour and we were only able to add Dark-necked Tailorbird from the hostel. We decided to do the Grid trails and ended up just walking the West Trail which wasn't particularly well maintained (a common theme actually for the trails that we did at the DVFC). That being said, the side trails going off from the West trail were seemingly in even worse shape with one or two no longer even visible (though I don't know what they have been like in the past). For example, there was no indication of any trailhead for the supposed trail on the north side at W10, where the Honeyguide had been seen as per previous trip reports.

Near the beginning of the West Trail we again spotted the pair of **Bristleheads** Jukka had seen here a couple days previous. This was followed by our first Grey-headed Babblers, skulking in the undergrowth. The trail was very quiet after this with a couple Siberian Blue Thrushes, a pair of Orange-backed Woodpeckers and another **Sunda Blue Flycatcher** among the few birds seen. Around 10:00, Jukka had to return to the Hostel to get ready for his transfer back to Lahad Datu

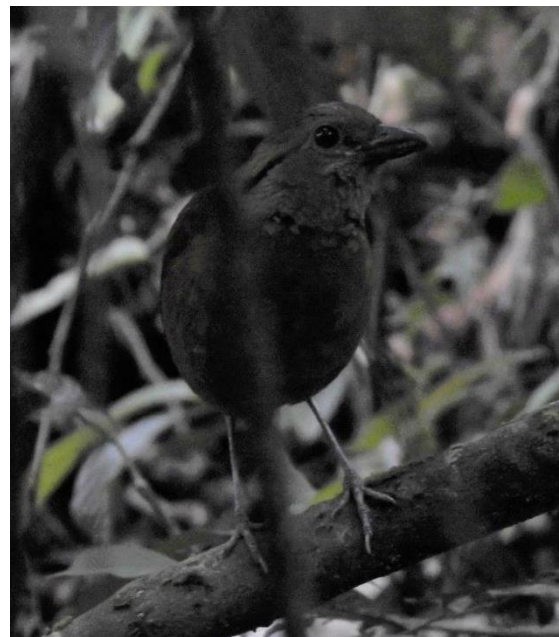
and homeward flight(s). I continued on the trail, getting quick looks at a Buff-rumped Woodpecker. Just after W11 I stumbled across at **Great Argus** at its lek, right on the trail. At W12 I finally got a response from a **Striped Wren-babbler** and after a bit of hide-and-seek was able to see it quite well. Returning back down the trail I was hoping the Argus would be back on its lek. Unfortunately, an Orangutan had moved into the trees above the lek and was making a bit of a racket moving about which might have contributed to the lack of an Argus.



Narcissus Flycatcher

A small understory flock held a **Grey-chested Jungle-flycatcher** as well as a spiffy looking pair of Maroon-breasted Philentomas. At the stream-crossing at W5 a trio of **Striped Wren-babblers** flew up from the water post-bathing and I was able to watch them shake out and preen a bit before they took off. Back by the reception hall a delightful male Narcissus Flycatcher flitted into sight at the roadside.

After lunch and a short rest, I set off around 15:20 along East Trail that sets off right behind the hostel. Walking towards the Adventure trail I soon heard a trogon but it would not show itself. The birding was slow to begin with but eventually, as I got closer to the Adventure trail things picked up. First, a male **Great Argus** came into view, walking quietly on the trail ahead of me. A large fruiting tree was visible through a small gap in the undergrowth and here I could see a fantastic pair of **Helmeted Hornbills** feeding beside a pair of Rhinoceros Hornbills and a bunch of Green Pigeons (mostly large but some smaller ones remained unidentified as they were just a bit too far away to ID among the foliage). Thrilled with these mega Hornbills, my attention was pulled away by a little troupe of **Fluffy-backed Tit-babblers** that circled around me. Incidentally, while best viewed from this point on the trail, the fruiting tree in question was at least partially visible from the camping area and could have been scoped from there.



Giant Pitta

The best was yet to come though as about 75m before the junction with the Adventure trail I noticed a large, orange Pitta-like blob hopping beside the trail. Lo and behold, it popped up onto a low branch and there it was, a stunning female **Giant Pitta**! It was remarkably cooperative, remaining on that perch for a couple minutes as I tried my best to get a couple photos in the terrible lighting. Eventually it hopped down and made its way over the bank and down the slope where I was able to get some more nice views. The only damper on the afternoon was the Jukka wasn't there to enjoy it as well. On the track leading up to the camping area I spotted a Blue-eared Barbet in a nearby tree and a **Bornean Crested Fireback** crossing the road.

Nov. 2, 2022

For my final morning at the DVFC I had just a couple hours to bird so I returned to the entrance road to try to track down the Pitta from our first morning. En route I encountered my first **White-crowned Forktail**, a couple **Bornean Bristleheads** as well as my only **Scarlet-rumped Trogon**, a superb male. Getting to the Pitta spot, I had no response but tried about 50m further along the road at a place where there was good visibility downslope (this is about 75m before the culvert that more or less marks the edge of the Rhino enclosure clearing). Playing the Bornean Banded Pitta tape this time did draw out a response but now (after trying the tape occasionally the past few days) I realized that the response sounded more like **Blue-headed Pitta**. Sure enough, once I was playing the right call I was, in short order, watching the bird hopping around the slope less than 10m below me. It popped onto a log for a couple minutes before flying up to a branch in the lower subcanopy at about eye level for me; a wonderful way



Blue-headed Pitta

to finish up at the DVFC! On my way back to the hostel I found a trio of Dusky Broadbills at a nest, hanging right over the road, and another Orange-backed Woodpecker.

The scheduled transfer leaves at 08:30 and after a fairly uneventful drive out (a Storm's Stork walking around in a flooded section of forest beside the road was a nice surprise) myself and a couple other travelers arrived in Lahad Datu from where I caught a bus to Sepilok without much difficulty. I did grab a taxi from the DVFC office to the bus terminal and then had time for lunch nearby before the bus left at 13:00.

I was dropped at the Sepilok junction and here there were a couple waiting taxis, one of which I

took to the Sepilok B&B, a couple km down the road. In the remaining daylight I wandered around the grounds, not wanting to go far as the sky was threatening rain. A few common birds were seen but overall the birding was very subdued.

Nov. 3, 2022

I got to the Rainforest Discovery Centre just after 06:00. There was nobody at the gate so I went in and paid my entrance fee in the afternoon when the ticket office was manned. I headed straight for the canopy walkway and towers and spent the first couple hours of the morning there. Activity was light to start with. A pair of **White-bellied Woodpeckers** were noisy and showed well on numerous occasions. Slowly a few birds showed up, some flyby Blue-crowned Hanging Parrots and Common Hill Mynas, a couple pairs of Green Ioras and my first Large Woodshrike of the trip.

The best action was from the Hornbill tower with an accommodating pair of Black-and-yellow Broadbills near the base and Fiery Minivets and Dark-throated Oriole at the top. As I left the canopy walkway, somewhat disappointed with the low activity, a **Wallace's Hawk-eagle** was perched only about 30m away and it let me pass by and take some photos. Here I also enjoyed seeing a Bartlett's Flying Dragon glide between trees. As I was leaving the boardwalk I spotted my first **Red-naped Trogon**, an immature male. I spent the rest of the morning on the trails, taking the Pitta Path a short ways to the Tarsier Crossing trail, following that and then the Mousedeer Trail before looping back to the entrance along the far end of the Pitta Path then Ridge Trail. At the beginning of the Pitta Path the trail crosses a small stream. I tried for Rufous-collared Kingfisher and was briefly fooled by a Drongo mimicking my playback. While looking for the "Kingfisher" though I did spot a lovely **Chestnut-capped Thrush**! It only stuck around for a few seconds before flying off, over the hill on the other side of the stream. Once on the Tarsier Crossing trail I found a good amount of activity where it crossed back over the same stream as the Pitta Path. Single Short-tailed, **Black-capped** and Ferruginous Babblers as well as a pair of Fluffy-backed Tit-babblers were haunting the undergrowth while a Rufous-winged Philentoma came within a metre of my head as it sang its



Wallace's Hawk-eagle



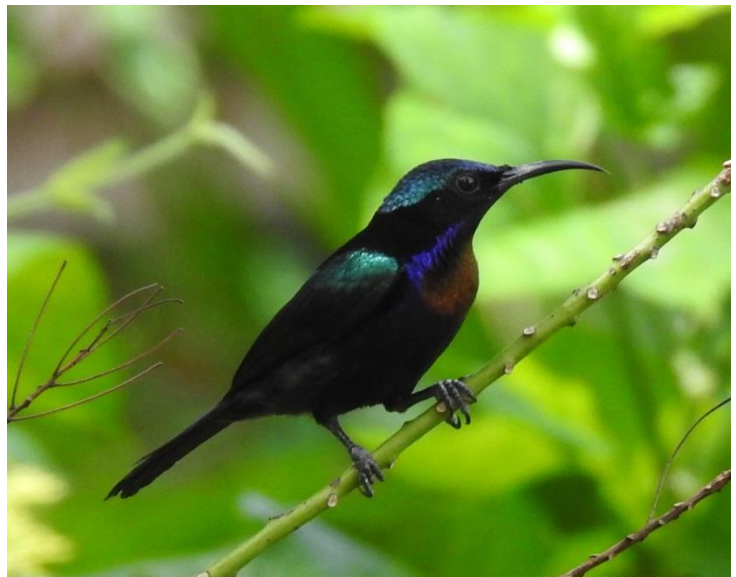
Red-naped Trogon

way upstream. A loud owl-like call came from the trees about 50m upstream but as I was busy trying to photograph the various birds around me, and I knew so few of the calls, I didn't really pay it much mind. This was unfortunate as I heard this call again, after dark while owling and it sounded a good deal like my tape for Barred Eagle-owl (though I'm not sure why it would have called late morning).

At any rate, further along the trail I encountered a female **Red-naped Trogon** and a few other bits and bobs though activity petered out as the morning heated up. As I walked back along the Ridge trail I encountered a nice dark phase Changeable Hawk-eagle and tracking down a persistent call in the mid-canopy gave me my only **Long-billed Spiderhunter**.

On my way back to the B&B I found a few birds around the bus shelter (at least that's what it looks like) just down the road from the RDC entrance. In the flowers here were Brown-throated and Copper-throated Sunbirds.

After lunch, I headed back to the RDC, paying my entrance fee for the day and starting down the Kingfisher Trail. A female Narcissus Flycatcher was one of the first birds I saw and nearby, a Ruby-cheeked Sunbird. There were few birds about though as I finished the Kingfisher trail and looped around to the Minivet House near the Hornbill Tower. From the Minivet House I was delighted to see a **Rufous-backed Dwarf-Kingfisher** shining like a beacon in the dim late afternoon forest. It stuck around for good views and even a few poor photos. Climbing up the Hornbill Tower I noticed a distant hornbill flying by. From the quick look I got it was either Wrinkled or Wreathed. As the latter was the only Bornean hornbill I was missing I quickly descended and headed over towards the Broadbill tower which I reasoned would be my closest vantage point to where it



Copper-throated Sunbird

seemingly was flying. Alas, I could not track it down again and had to be content with a few Blue-throated Bee-eaters. One of the final birds I saw, along the Ridge Trail was a White-crowned Shama that gave great looks as it scolded me.

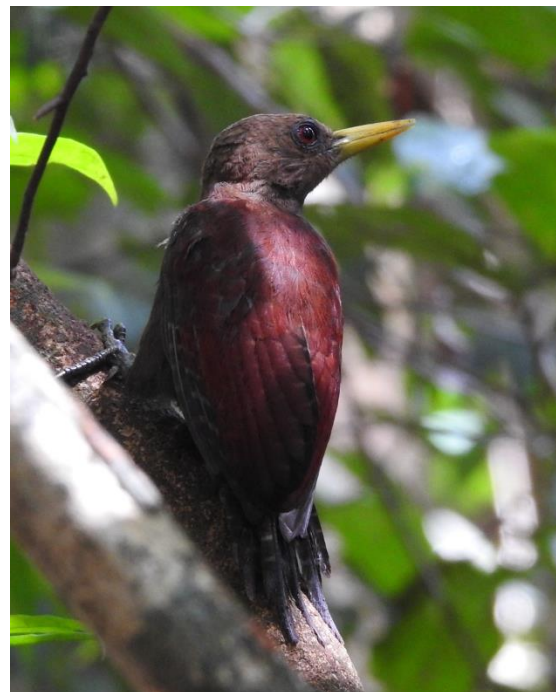
Wanting to do a bit of owling, I waited for dusk on the bench of the viewing area at the western edge of the walkway. This proved a lucky choice as I had a good view of the trees near where there were boxes for the Giant Flying Squirrels. One of these ran up to the top of a tree and proceeded to do its thing, gliding away from me to a tree out of sight.

Once it was properly dark I tried my luck along the Ridge Trail, first hearing a **Sunda Scops-owl** before getting a response from a **Reddish Scops-owl** shortly after. While trying to lure the latter in from the road I again heard what I later figured out must have been Barred Eagle-owl but I was focused on the Scops for the time being. Eventually, once it became evident the Scops wasn't going to budge, I found a little trail that connected down to the Tarsier Crossing trail and the owl was calling from a vine laden tree right by the path. Despite being able to walk a half circle around said tree, the owl remained frustratingly out of sight, presumably buried in the vine tangle. As I had been warned by a ranger guiding the night walk that I was to be out of the RDC by 19:00 I decided to heed his instruction so I ended my short owling session. Plus, I didn't fancy missing dinner as I believe the B&B kitchen closes at 20:00 and I hadn't pre-ordered my meal.

Nov. 4, 2022

For my final morning in Borneo, I opted to start at a fruiting tree near the parking lot that I had read in a couple trip reports can be good for flowerpeckers. The tree in question is just beyond the RDC parking lot, about where the pavement ends on the road that continues on to the My Nature Resort. The tree was quite busy with a variety of Bulbuls including my first definite Cream-vented and Olive-winged as well as my only **Grey-bellied Bulbul**. There were indeed a few Flowerpeckers present including Orange-bellied and my first **Yellow-vented Flowerpecker** (an adult and a drab immature). A male Scarlet-backed was also seen nearby.

Leaving the tree to head into the RDC proper, I made a quick pass through the canopy walkway

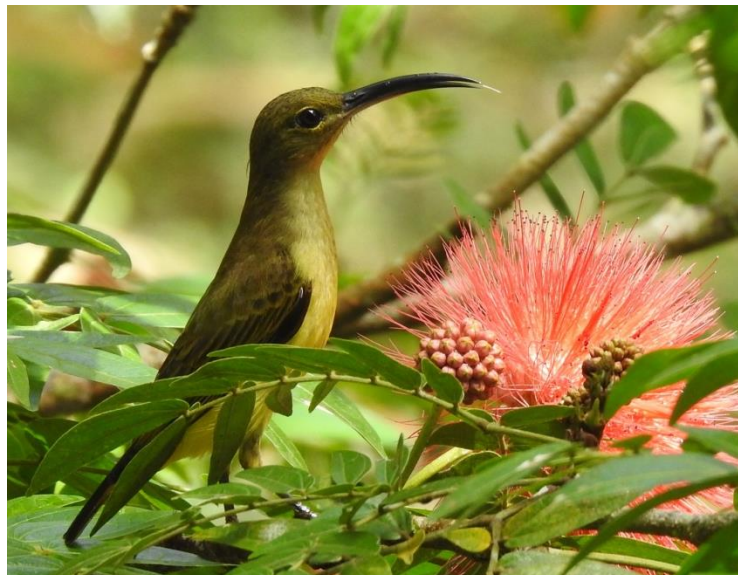


Maroon Woodpecker

finding my first pair of **Red-throated Sunbirds**. It was pretty quiet so I carried on to the Broadbill Tower in the hopes of maybe spotting my potential Wreathed Hornbill from the previous afternoon. While I did have Black, Bushy-crested and Rhinoceros Hornbills my quarry did not show up. Returning back along the Belian Trail I noted some Raffles Malkohas and a Grey-cheeked bulbul. Cutting off onto the Sepilok Bypass towards the Pitta trail was slow until just after I joined back up with the Pitta Trail. Here I got onto a very accommodating **Maroon Woodpecker**, thanks to some local birders. A **Bornean Black Magpie** was also showing in the canopy here while I enjoyed watching a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo following a small squirrel through the canopy, presumably hoping for flushed prey items. In the same area, one of the a Large Treeshrew was poking its head out of a cavity in a tree near the path. Incidentally, Treeshrews were fairly common at the RDC with several Large and one smaller (Lesser?) species seen.

Further along, I heard a **Black-crowned Pitta** that turned out was somewhere reasonably high up in a tree right over the trail. Having seen one well at Kinabatangan I only spent a couple minutes trying to spot it. I wanted to revisit the place where I had heard the possible Barred Eagle-owl on the Tarsier Crossing trail so I headed there next. I scanned the trees where the call had come from to no avail and there was no sign of the activity that I had in the area yesterday either.

As I started to return to the Pitta Trail, I flushed a medium-small heron from the slope above the small stream. It briefly perched on a branch before flying further off and out of sight. Unfortunately, I only got poor looks so couldn't tell what it was though my impression was that it looked barred on the neck and I did notice that it appear to have white wingtips, a trait I later read matches Malayan Night-heron. From the brief and poor views I got though, I am loathe to put a confident ID on it though it seems probable it was indeed a juvenile of that species. A pair of **White-bellied Woodpeckers** were working a dead stump near the trail not long before I was back on the Ridge Trail (road). In the flowering bushes beside the Teuring Café were two **Thick-billed Spiderhunters**.



Thick-billed Spiderhunter

After returning to the B&B to pack,

I was told the kitchen there was closed for lunch already (only just after noon, a bit strange) so I returned to the Teuring Café where I had a nice plate of noodles and watched the Spiderhunters some more. After an unproductive jaunt around the vicinity of the café I decided to do a quick loop around the lake on the Riverine Trail. This was also nearly bird-less though I did see my first Silver-rumped Needletail and I spotted a couple more from the parking lot a bit later. I rounded out my birding with another stakeout at the fruiting tree in the hopes of Brown-backed Flowerpecker. Many of the same birds were around as in the morning but nothing new was added.

Back at the B&B, one of the staff offered to drive me to the airport for 50MYR and so ended a very enjoyable two weeks in Borneo!



White-bellied Woodpecker