Peninsula Malaysia 12th-25th April 2015 – Trip Report
By Oliver Simms

Summary

I had booked the last two weeks of April off with the intention of going to Turkey but the situation in the region made my plans unfeasible. I, together with a few others, considered a variety of other locations from Morocco to Sri Lanka but, following a suggestion on the Oriental Bird Club Facebook page, settled on Malaysia. I had hoped other Next Generation Birders would want to come but when it became clear that for various reasons they could not, I resolved to go myself. This was to be my first visit to Asia since I became a birder (I went to Sri Lanka when I was about 10!). After reading various itineraries, I decided one night at Kuala Selangor, 5 at Fraser’s Hill and 6 at Taman Negara. I received a lot of help with planning the trip and I’d like to particularly thank Andy Walker, Chris Goodie, Steve Keen, Mike Edgecombe and Helena Craig for their advice.

I birded independently for most the trip but spent two days birding at Taman Negara with David Eades from Australia who seemed to be the only other birder there during my stay! I did not use guides throughout the trip for two reasons; one was money but the other was that I quite like to find the birds myself.

During the trip, I identified 218 species of bird (10 + Heard Only) and 22 species of mammal. I am pretty happy with this for a first visit and it included some real crackers like Garnet Pitta, Rail-babbler, Malayan Laughingthrush and Great Argus. I think I would have got a few more species with a guide but the species I seemed to miss were Hornbills and Trogons – only one species of each – which I did not imagine would be difficult to find! In the case of Banded Pitta, I think I was desperately unlucky to flush two off the path and not get any sort of tickable views.

Logistics

The whole trip cost in the region of £1250 including flights and food. I flew with Emirates via Dubai and this was very good. Malaysia was a cheap country and the food was generally good as long as you like rice. At Kuala Tahan/Taman Negara, the shops did not sell a great variety so it is a good job I like biscuits. I travelled around by taxi as I do not drive and a car is unnecessary at each location but may have been helpful at Fraser’s Hill.

5 Ringgit (RM) = £1

The journeys were as follows:

Airport - Kuala Selangor: Taxi (140RM) – make sure the ticket seller is clear where you went to go as I had a bit of confusion as the attendant sold me the wrong ticket so I had to get it changed.

Kuala Selangor – Fraser’s Hill: Car (200RM) – Stephen Hogg, owner of Buona Vista where I stayed, did the pick up which was very kind of him.

Fraser’s Hill – Taman Negara: Taxi (260 RM) & Boat (37RM) – Very pleasant boat trip and good for seeing birds. I arranged the taxi through the Puncak Inn.
Taman Negara – Airport: Bus (7RM) & Taxi (300RM) – I had planned to do the whole journey by bus but when I found I had a 2 hour wait in Jerantut, I splashed out on a taxi. Several tour operators offer transfers to Kuala Lumpur for 100RM but these leave at 9am and I wanted to maximise my time in Taman Negara.

Places I stayed

Sun Inns, Kuala Selangor – This was cheap and did the job but was too far from the nature park so I had to take taxis each way.

Buona Vista Bungalow / Stephen’s Place, Fraser’s Hill – I cannot recommend this place enough. It was comfortable & clean with great food. The location on the Telekom Loop was great for birds and Stephen was an excellent host, dropping me off where I wanted to be each day.

Mutiara Hostel, Taman Negara – It was bizarre being in an expensive hotel and getting things like a “welcome drink” to then stay in a fairly shabby hostel. The showers & toilets were not great but I had the hostel all to myself and was more than adequate. The food in the restaurant was pricey by Malaysian standards but pretty good and breakfast was included. I think I would have got more for my money in town but it was good being the right side of the river.

Concorde Inn, Kuala Lumpur Airport – Functional airport hotel.

Day by Day Summary

Day 1: Sunday 12th – Kuala Selangor

My flights ran smoothly and I arrived at Kuala Lumpur at around 08:30 a little weary but raring to go. As soon as the plane landed, I picked up my first species – a Purple Heron, the only one I saw all trip! A small mix up over the taxi ticket meant that the taxi driver had to turn back to the airport but this small loop produced my first three lifers, Spotted Dove, Javan Myna and, best of all, my only Chinese Pond Heron flying out of a ditch. A few minutes later, everything was sorted out and I was on my way. The 90 minute drive was surprisingly productive as I recorded a further 12 species. The picks of the bunch were 2 Crested Serpent Eagles perched on lampposts, a Black-shouldered Kite, several White-throated Kingfisher and a Brown Shrike. A sizeable flock of thermalling storks escaped identification and I am still completely baffled by them.

After leaving my bags at the hotel, I was in the Kuala Selangor nature park by late morning and immediately started picking up new species. Even in the car park, new species included the abundant Oriental Magpie Robins and a Black-naped Oriole, while the first of several superb White-bellied Sea Eagles flew overhead. The path through the initial woodland produced more new species including a Pied Fantail and migrants such as Arctic Warbler and Brown Flycatcher. Arriving at the tower, I immediately noticed my first Collared Kingfisher as well as the circling Brahminy Kites. For the next few hours, I walked around the nature park. The lagoon itself was pretty quiet apart from Mudskippers, Crabs and Water Monitors but the bushes held Common Iora, Ashy Tailorbird, Yellow-bellied Prinia and Olive-winged Bulbul, amongst others. A flyby Flameback species was too quick to secure the identification.
The mangrove area was particularly productive with 3 Mangrove Whistlers, a Mangrove Blue Flycatcher and the familiar sight of 4 Great Tits (apparently now split!).

By late afternoon, I walked in to town for an overdue lunch and a short break but soon returned to the nature park. During the walk, I saw my first monkeys, both Silvery Langurs and Long-tailed Macaques, as well as Ruby-cheeked and Olive Sunbirds, Zebra Dove and an overflying Blue-throated Bee-eater. Frustratingly, a high flying Sparrowhawk sp. was too distant to make any attempt at identifying it. I returned to the tower for the next hour and added a brief Laced Woodpecker and flocks of Pink-necked Green Pigeons. By early evening, the weather had turned so I decided to take a taxi back to the hotel but I still managed to add White-breasted Waterhen and Asian Koel before dark from the hotel. By this stage, I was shattered but it had been a very good start to the trip.

Trip list after day 1: 44

Day 2: Monday 13th – Kuala Selangor to Fraser’s Hill

I toyed with the idea of heading to Pantai Remis to look for waders but in the end decided to return to the nature park with certain targets in mind. One of these targets, Abbott’s Babbler, I found almost instantly having learnt the call overnight. During the next few hours, I recorded a total of 6 new species for the trip including key targets as Black-capped Kingfisher, Pied Triller, Brown-throated Sunbird and Coppersmith Barbet. An overflying Bee-eater revealed its brown throat to secure its identity as the only Blue-tailed Bee-eater of the trip, while a superb male Mugimaki Flycatcher was a bit of a surprise. Raptor activity continued to be noticeable and I attach a photo of a bird I initially took to be an Oriental Honey Buzzard but I now believe is a Crested Serpent Eagle. Thoughts welcome!

Late morning I returned to the hotel and, at midday, Stephen Hogg from Buona Vista bungalow picked me up for the three hour drive to Fraser’s Hill. The journey was quiet apart but I did add Paddyfield Pipit and Emerald Dove and, as we neared Fraser’s Hill, Slaty-backed Forktail, Mountain Bulbul and the numerous Glossy Swiftlets. That afternoon, I headed out for a walk round the Telekom Loop with Stephen’s nine year old son, Adam, and we recorded an excellent total of 21 new species. It started quietly but soon I was seeing the common birds of the area such as Long-tailed Sibia, Silver-eared Mesia, Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush, Streaked Spiderhunter, Bronzed Drongo, Mountain Fulvetta, Mountain Tailorbird, Blue-winged Minla, Rufous-browed Flycatcher and White-throated Fantail. The walk did produce some scarcer birds including a Little Spiderhunter, a Blyth’s Shrike-babbler, 2 Black Laughingthrushes, a male Fire-throated Flowerpecker, a superb male Red-headed Trogon and a much-desired Long-tailed Broadbill. Other birds seen included Grey-chinned Minivet, Fire-tufted & Black-browed Barbets, Little Pied Flycatcher and Black-throated Sunbird. I heard a Collared Owlet closely at the start of the walk but, in my excitement to get going, I did not search for it thoroughly. This was a decision I now regret as I never did see a Collared Owlet. Another frustrating Owl was the Mountain Scops Owl, which called in the evening but was distant and unresponsive to tape. Nevertheless, it had been a brilliant start to my time at Fraser’s Hill.

Trip list after day 2: 77

Day 3: Tuesday 14th – Fraser’s Hill (Telekom Loop am, Bishop & Hemmant’s trail pm)
After the success of the previous day’s walk, I decided to start the next day with a circuit of the Telekom Loop. It was noticeably quieter but I soon found my first bird lifer of the morning, a couple of Little Cuckoo Doves, and my first mammal lifer, a couple of Dusky Langurs. Next was a stunning Common Green Magpie, a bird missed on several recent Birdquest tours but I found them quite common. After an hour or so, I encountered my first decent bird wave including a Greater Yellownape and 2 Blue Nuthatch, a key target for the trip. A second bird wave contained a Black-eared Shrike-babbler, several Golden Babblers and a Buff-breasted Babbler. The latter two were particularly pleasing as I thought I might struggle with babblers without a guide. Another highlight of the morning was a brief Blyth’s Hawk Eagle that drifted overhead.

Just after midday, I returned to Buona Vista and Stephen dropped me off in town where I enjoyed an excellent afternoon’s birding. In fact, even in the centre of town, I found my first lifer of the afternoon, an Orange-bellied Leafbird. I then set off and started the Hemmant Trail. A quiet start soon burst in to life as I heard some crashing below the trail so I looked down and briefly saw some round bright orange game birds before they flew off, making a clucking noise. Ferruginous Partridge! Further crashing revealed my first White-thighed Leaf Monkeys and I also flushed an Emerald Dove. My first bird wave was a long time coming but it was a really good one as in addition to the usual species, it contained Greater Yellownape and Black Laughingthrush. More interesting for me was my first Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, a Dark-necked Tailorbird and an Eastern Crowned Warbler that eventually revealed its crown stripe to secure its identification. At the exit to the trail, I found my only Large Niltava of the trip and some House Swifts flew overhead.

The start of the Bishop Trail was also productive as the bird wave there contained new birds including Grey-throated Babbler and Lesser Yellownape. I’m fairly certain I saw the back end of a Green-billed Malkoha but cannot be certain and this was a bird that frustrated me during my time at Fraser’s Hill. The rest of the trail was full of bird sound but I struggled to find birds but did manage to turn up a superb Chestnut-winged Cuckoo, a bird that was not even on my radar for the trip! I also found 3 Everett’s White-eyes at the exit to the trail and a superb but brief Hodgson’s Hawk Cuckoo along Lady Maxwell’s Drive. I then decided to give the Hemmant Trail another try as some birders told me they had seen a White-tailed Robin along the trail.

Then came the jammiest moment of the trip: I tried a speculative play of the White-tailed Robin tape but I left it on too long by mistake and the next song happened to be Lesser Shortwing. This, which had not been calling, then started responding so I left the tape on and it came and sat on the path. What a fluke! It was a brilliant end to the day but the day was not over as while waiting for Stephen in the centre of town, I was surprised to see a Dusky Crag Martin circling above the golf course.

Trip list after day 3: 98

Day 4: Wednesday 15th – Fraser’s Hill (Golf course, New Road, Hemmant Trail, Telekom Loop)

I had planned to go down to the Gap this morning but the heavy overnight rain had caused several landslides and the road to town was blocked meaning that Stephen had to drop me off at the edge of town. I decided to head along the golf course and down the New Road in the vain hope of finding Malayan Whistling Thrush, which were not being reliably seen, and
some hornbills, which I had terrible luck with all trip. This turned out to be a good decision as I soon found two Yellow-throated Martens running along the road, one of the mammal highlights of the trip. While unsuccessfully trying to refind them, I stumbled across my first White-rumped Munias. Just above the New Road, a decent bird wave contained Common Tailorbird, Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker and 3 funky Sultan Tits. I then spent a frustrating half an hour or so chasing a very uncooperative Pygmy Wren-babbler, which seemed to get close and then move further away. I did not even see movement and this species must go down as one of the worse misses of the trip. I walked a couple of kilometres down the road and, while quiet in terms of bird waves, I did manage 4 new species (Stripe-throated Bulbul, Black-crested Bulbul, Gold-whiskered Barbet and Hill Blue Flycatcher). In hindsight, I wish I had spent longer walking down the road as who knows what I might have found?

The next stop was the Maxwell trail but a combination of a poorly marked path and numerous leech bites (my only ones of the whole trip) meant that I made a hasty retreat, although I did see another Dusky Crag Martin by the entrance. A change of plan saw me walk down the road to the area between the Hemmant and Bishop trails, consistently one of the best areas for birding during my stay. Here I found both Dollarbird and a rufous Asian Paradise Flycatcher, two birds I did not expect at this elevation. Next I decided to take the Hemmant Trail back to town and was helpfully pointed out a female White-tailed Robin on its nest. However, there was further disappointment with the tape as a calling Rusty-naped Pitta in an accessible area moved further away after I tried the tape. I understand this is fairly typical of this notoriously difficult species.

In the early evening, I walked the Hemmant Loop, which was frustratingly birdless. The only highlights were my first Plain Flowerpecker in Buona Vista garden and finally cracking the identity of Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher, which were not uncommon though typically elusive in the flocks. A night session however was more productive as I enjoyed good views of Large-tailed Nightjar and Lesser Giant Flying Squirrel. The ever-present Mountain Scops Owl, however, decided better of being responsive.

Trip list after day 4: 112

Day 5: Thursday 16th – Fraser’s Hill (The Gap, Old Road, Jelai Resort, Hemnant Trail)

What a day! I’d been looking forward to trying the Gap since I got to Fraser’s Hill and I was finally able to put the plan in to action. Stephen drove me down the New Road in the morning and even this was productive with better views of Slaty-backed Forktail and a brief Coucal species. At the Gap, I immediately started to add new species. Mountain Imperial Pigeons, Grey-rumped Treeswift and Large-billed Crows flew overhead, while in the trees I immediately found Greater Racket-tailed Drongo, Asian Fairy Bluebird, Scarlet Minivet and, best of all, a Black-bellied Malkoha. As always, a calling Collared Owlet failed to give itself up but a family party of Pin-striped Tit-babblers were more co-operative. It seemed there had been a bit of a fall as I found a number of migrants including Brown Flycatcher, 2 Arctic Warbler, Brown Shrike and a Dark-sided Flycatcher. The short work from the bottom of the New Road to the Old Gap Resthouse was also productive with Ashy Bulbul, my only Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike and a superb Verditer Flycatcher. At the dilapidated Resthouse, I found several Rufous-bellied Swallows, my first peninsular endemic, and saw both Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot and Pacific Swift fly overhead. It had been a brilliant start to the morning with 15 new species in under two hours, although I was unfortunately unable to find the Large Woodshrike that two birders had reported seeing. They were primarily looking for
raptors and, like them, I had not at this stage seen any. I, however, decided to walk back to the start of the New Road before ascending the Old Road to see what else I could find and I stumbled on a circling Black Eagle and, while watching it, an Oriental Honey Buzzard drifted past.

At around 11am, I started the long walk up the Old Road. In hindsight, I wish I had spent more time at the Gap as I think I could have added more species, especially if I walked further down the road past the Old Gap Resthouse, but I was eager to check out the Old Road. It was not as productive as I had hoped but in the lower 3 kilometres, I managed Ochraceous Bulbul, Blue-winged Leafbird, Rufous Woodpecker and Red-bearded Bee Eater. Confusion over the location of the Marbled Wren-babbler gully meant I missed the opportunity to dip this notoriously difficult species. I think the gully must be a lot nearer the start of the road than 3 kilometres up as the trip report I read led me to believe. The next few kilometres were quiet but towards the top I stumbled upon a decent bird wave that contained my first few White-bellied Erpomis, as well as Greater Yellownape, Blue Nuthatch, Asian Paradise Flycatcher and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher. I also saw a superb Blyth’s Hawk Eagle circle overhead.

After a short break in the centre of Fraser’s Hill, I decided to head to the abandoned Jelai Resort, previously the highlight of most visits to Fraser’s Hill. The limited gardens were still full of birds. Speculative plays of a few tapes of birds I had not seen was surprisingly successful as a Black-and-Crimson Oriole responded and I enjoyed decent views. I then walked along the road to the area between the Hemmant and Bishop Trails. I believe I heard some more Collared Owlets on route but the situation was confused by a group of bird photographers blasting it out as a lure for other birds. I have no issue with tapes but I’m not sure I agree with this and, moreover, it did not seem remotely effective. Anyway, at the junction of the two trails, I found another good bird wave containing Eastern Crowned Warbler, Black Laughingthrush and Grey-fronted Babbler. The pick of the bunch, however, was my only Chestnut-crowned Warblers of the trip. That evening, I tried a spot of night birding but to no avail though Stephen’s moth trip was particularly lively.

Trip list after day 6: 136

Day 6: Friday 17th – Fraser’s Hill (Pine Tree Trail, Bishop Trail, Hemmant Trail)

After yesterday’s success, today was a great disappointment. I decided that I would walk the Pine Tree trail as this is supposed to be the haunt of some of the rarest birds of Fraser’s Hill including Mountain Peacock Pheasant, Cutia and Long-billed Partridge. I found none of these.

The day started so well as by the entrance to the trail I found both Mountain Leaf Warbler and a couple of Malayan Laughingthrush, an endemic that I had been told was not being reliably seen, on the road by the entrance. Buoyed by this early success, I set off up this trail but it was very quiet and I did not encounter a single meaningful bird wave. After about three kilometres and a couple of hours, I decided to turn around. The way back was marginally more productive as I found my first Buff-necked Woodpecker and a bird wave but it did not contain anything unusual apart from Blue Nuthatch.

I decided to return to town and try the main trails that had been so productive up to this point. Indeed, there were more birds here but I could not find anything new. There were supposedly
common birds that I still needed including Streaked Wren Babbler, Speckled Piculet, Green-billed Malkoha, Javan Cuckoo-shrike, Wreathed Hornbill and Yellow-bellied Warbler but, try as I might, I could not find them. The best I managed was a Grey-fronted Babbler, two Blue Nuthatch and a Yellow-bellied Erpobis.

Early evening, I decided to call it a day and Stephen picked me up in town. This proved to be a good decision as I saw a Buff-necked Woodpecker in the garden before dusk. Another attempt at Mountain Scops Owl after dark proved unsuccessful despite two birds calling but I did see two Lesser Giant Flying Squirrels and a smaller Red-cheeked Flying Squirrel. Today may have been a slightly disappointing end to my stay in Fraser’s Hill but the other days had been brilliant and my trip list was still flying.

Species list at the end of Day 7: 140

Day 7: Saturday 18th – Fraser’s Hill – Kuala Tembeling – Taman Negara (Tahan Hide & Swamp Loop)

Today was the day that I was leaving the hill station of Fraser’s Hill and heading to the legendary Taman Negara. The day got off to a brilliant start as the first bird I saw was my first and only Javan Cuckoo-shrike, a bird that had been pestering me by its call for the past few days. This was my final new bird at Fraser’s Hill as by 9 o’clock I was in a taxi. The 3 hour drive was unproductive but I did manage to find a couple of Common Mynas at the jetty. From the boat, I enjoyed three more lifers; a couple of Black Nest-Swiftlets, a Black-and-Red Broadbill and a Red-wattled Lapwing, as well as decent views of Crested Serpent Eagle, 2 Oriental Honey Buzzards and the abundant Blue-throated Bee-eaters.

Once at Taman Negara, I immediately headed to the Tahan Hide, which was quiet apart from a Greater Racket-tailed Drongo and two ever present distant Mynas that I’m fairly sure were Javan rather than Jungle. I then decided to try the Swamp Loop and soon bumped in to a group of four Crested Partridge, a key target that I certainly did not expect to find quite so easy! The rest of the Swamp Loop was quiet apart from a brief Purple-naped Sunbird so I returned to the Tahan Hide with Australian birder David Eades, who I’d bumped in to on the Swamp Loop. The evening session was more productive as we found a large Bulbul flock that we managed to extract Stripe-headed, Black-headed and Red-eyed Bulbul from, a Drongo Cuckoo and two fairly distant Black-thighed Falconets. It had been a decent start to my time at Taman Negara and I was excited for what the next day would bring.

Species list at the end of Day 8: 151

Day 8: Sunday 19th April – Taman Negara (Tahan Hide, Swamp Loop, Tabing Trail, Canopy walkway trail)

I started my first full day at Taman Negara at the Tahan Hide and this was fairly productive with my first Little and Thick-billed Green Pigeons and my only Greater Green Leafbird of the trip. I then tried the Swamp Loop but it was quiet so I returned to the resort for breakfast. There was a bird count event going on and I thought about joining it but the sizes of the groups meant I decided I was best off on my own.

After breakfast, I decided to walk the Tabing Trail but in the two hours or so, I struggled to find anything at all. I could hear lots of birds and I got a few brief glimpses of movement but
I could not get a proper view of anything. It soon dawned on me that birding Taman Negara alone would be a lot more difficult than I anticipated. The frustration was only broken up by a brief flyby Blue-banded Kingfisher at Lubok Simpon. Around a kilometre from the Tabing Hide, I decided to cut my losses and turn back but the way back was far more productive. I found my first White-rumped Shamas and Black-naped Monarchs as well as scarcer fare such as 2 Green Broadbill, a Yellow-bellied Bulbul and a superb Malaysian Blue Flycatcher. In the clearing at the start of the trail, I found a Greater Coucal, while from the campsite jetty, I enjoyed the first of many Raffles’ Malkohas.

After a late lunch, I started heading towards the Canopy Walkway but rain soon interrupted my progress and I returned to the Tahan Hide. However, just before the rain came, I found my first Pitta – a Blue-winged on the path at the edge of the resort that stayed in the open long enough for me to get my camera out the bag! From the Tahan Hide, I identified my first Spectacled Bulbuls and was delighted to find a Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike after this family had proved so elusive at Fraser’s Hill. Once the rain had passed, I headed back towards the canopy walkway and enjoyed superb views of Plaintive Cuckoo. The canopy walkway was closed when I got there but I found a couple of White-breasted Babbler by the entrance and a Long-billed Spiderhunter on the return.

I arrived back at the resort with about an hour of light spare so I headed to the campsite jetty. This proved to be a good decision as in addition to the superb Blue-throated Bee-eaters, I saw both Blue-eared and Stork-billed Kingfishers. At dusk I headed back to my room but not before I enjoyed superb views of a pair of Crested Firebacks. After a difficult start, I had managed to rack up 20 new species in a single day and I was excited for what I might find in the rest of my time in this stunning forest.

Species Count at the end of Day 8: 171

Day 9: Monday 20th April – Taman Negara (Tahan Hide, Jenut Muda, various trails near the resort)

I had agreed with David Eades to go with him up Jenut Muda to look for a Garnet Pitta that he had heard calling a couple of days earlier but not been able to find and we agreed to meet in the Tahan Hide. While waiting for him, I enjoyed an excellent start to the day including clinching the identity of Silver-rumped Needletail and Cream-vented Bulbul, birds I had previously only had poor views of. In addition, I also found my first Chestnut-winged Babblers, which responded very nicely to tape. On the trail towards the turn off to Jenut Muda, we enjoyed a very decent start to the day with new birds for me like Red-throated Barbet, Hairy-backed Bulbul and a ridiculous-looking Black-and-Yellow Broadbill, as well as a new bird for David in the form of 3 Scarlet Minivet.

The Jenut Muda trail started quietly although we did find a nice Scaly-crowned Babbler. There was no sound of the Garnet Pitta and we were frustrated by a close calling Malaysian Peacock Pheasant that never showed itself and a more distant calling Great Argus. Then David heard a sound that stopped us both in our tracks. An hour or so ensued as we repeatedly appeared to get close before the sound moved further away but eventually I caught sight of it and shouted “there it is!” Somehow David got on to it from these helpful instructions and we enjoyed brief but decent views of one of the most sought after and elusive residents of the forest, Rail-babbler! Many had told me beforehand that I would never find Rail-babbler without a guide but, with the help of David, I had proved them all wrong.
The rest of the trail was predictably an anti-climax but we did find a Sooty-capped Babbler. After lunch, we returned to the Tahan Hide and had good views of a flyby Black Hornbill, remarkably my only Hornbill of the trip. Then we did a “flycatcher swap” where David showed me where he saw a Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher and I’d take him to where I saw the Malaysian Blue Flycatcher. This worked perfectly with both birds seen well and during the walk I saw both Banded and White-bellied Woodpecker, though unfortunately I could not get David on to either. At dusk, we went to the Canopy Jetty to look for Kingfishers but all we managed was a brief Little Heron.

Species list at the end of Day 9: 184

Day 10: Tuesday 21st April – Taman Negara (Blau Hide, Kuala Tahan, night drive)

Last night David and I arranged a boat to the Blau Jetty for 8am but before I met him, I decided to have a leisurely breakfast outside. This turned out to be a brilliant decision as I found a stunning Rufous-chested Flycatcher, 3 White-bellied Woodpecker and a Blue-eared Kingfisher. The boat ride itself was fairly quiet as was the forest. In the first hour or so, the only new bird for me was a family party of Black-throated Babblers, a bird David had seen previously. Nothing on the bird front was by the Blau hide apart from frustrating calling Black Magpies and a brief spiderhunter that escaped identification but we did enjoy a superb Prevost’s Squirrel.

The forest remained quiet until we heard another enigmatic sound, the bizarre call of the Garnet Pitta. Over an hour ensued as we entered deeper off path in to the forest and I felt we should turn back but David persuaded me to keep going in. Eventually I noticed the bird calling in a tree but in David’s rush to get to me, he knocked a few branches and the bird flew off. David was understandably distraught and the next couple of hours did little to help his mood. We tried to walk to the Yong Hide but ended up in some second growth that was full of litter so returned to the Blau Hide. Here we enjoyed my first Chestnut-breasted Malkoha and a few common Bulbuls but nothing new for David. Eventually he decided to have another go at the Garnet Pitta, while I stayed in the hide. His decision turned out to be a good one but my session in the hide was quiet apart from my first Common Hill Mynas and a calling Rail-babbler that I did not bother chasing.

After an hour or so I decided to leave the hide and soon flushed two birds off the path. For some reason as I got no features at all, I decided they were Banded Pittas and played the tape and one started responding. I started to go in after it as David arrived and we both headed in. However, the sound was quite far off and we had to leave for our boat. This was a frustrating end but it would have been greedy to get both sought after Pittas on the same day.

Once the boat had returned to Kuala Tahan, I decided to spend a couple of hours exploring the scrub and farm land in the town on Steve Keen’s recommendation. This was a good idea as I found four new birds (Asian Palm Swift, White-headed Munia, Baya Weaver and Barred Buttonquail) as well as superb views of two Blue-crowned Hanging Parrots. I returned to the Tahan Hide before dusk and enjoyed decent views of a Lesser Malay Chevrotain just before the entrance.

After dark, I decided to take one of the advertised night drives. I cannot say I was expecting much and it was a somewhat bizarre experience sitting on a roof of a jeep in a palm
plantation in a lightning storm with a “guide” who could have been no more than 10 years old. Nevertheless, it was surprisingly productive with 2 Leopard Cats, a Common Palm Civet, 2 Wild Boar, 2 Brown Wood Owl, 2 Barn Owl, a Large-tailed Nightjar and a sleeping White-breasted Waterhen. The claimed “Lesser Fish Eagles” were not Lesser Fish Eagles but sleeping Crested Serpent Eagles. What a good way to end to the day, completely confounding expectations!

Species list at the end of Day 10: 195

Day 11: Wednesday 22nd April – Taman Negara (Canopy Walkway, Bukit Teresek, Swamp Loop)

As usual, I started the day in the Tahan Hide but there was little around so I decided to head towards the Canopy Walkway. The walk was quiet but a stop at the walkway jetty turned out to be productive as I enjoyed 3 Red Junglefowls on the far bank. I was a bit concerned about whether they were wild as the male had white on the face but these fears were allayed when I later saw the same male from the Tahan Hide. While waiting for the walkway to open, I enjoyed superb views of a family of Grey-headed Babblers but was frustrated by calling Banded Broadbill, Moustached Babbler and Indian Cuckoo that all refused to show. The walkway itself was surprisingly productive as I enjoyed something of a Bulbul fest with 3 new species; Grey-bellied, Streaked and Buff-vented. Squirrels were also very evident as I saw a total of 5 (yes 5) species from the walkway including both Black and Pale Giant Squirrels. Rail-babblers was also again calling by here but the supposed Banded Pitta site by a big tree near the walkway remains a mystery. I received all sorts of conflicting information about places to look for Banded Pitta so my suspicion is none of the local guides really know where to look for them at the moment.

After the walkway, I decided to head up Teresek Hill and enjoyed my only Grey-cheeked Bulbul of the trip as well as several birds that I had seen previously at Fraser’s Hill like White-bellied Erpomis, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Buff-necked Woodpecker and Ashy Bulbul. At the top of the hill, I heard Rhinoceros Hornbill and Diard’s Trogon but, as always with these families on this trip, I was left disappointed. The way down was surprisingly tricky and quiet until that is I heard some rustling to my right. I looked and could not believe what I saw – 2 female Great Argus! Obviously I would have preferred a male but this species is very rarely seen and has been missed on the last three Birdquest tours to the area so I was delighted.

The Tabing trail was typically birdless so I returned to the resort for a late lunch before heading back to the Tahan Hide. There was nothing new from here but a walk round the Swamp Loop was successful as I enjoyed my first Rufous-winged Philentoma and excellent views of a Rufous Piculet. The rest of the day was quieter but I did see Blue-winged Pitta again and just before dark I saw the bright blue back of a small bird walk in to a bush. A Malaysian birder thought they saw a white front but I’m not sure. We waited until close to dusk but this bird never came out – my suspicion is it was a Siberian Blue Robin. After dark I enjoyed excellent views of the tame Malayan Tapir and an evening visit to the Tahan Hide amongst the crowds of tourists on night walks produced the only Sambar Deer of the trip.

Species list at the end of Day 11: 204
Day 12: Thursday 23rd April 2015 – Taman Negara (Tabing Trail, Jenut Muda, Tahan Hide, Resort, Swamp Loop)

I weighed up taking a boat to the Kumbang Hide area for my last full day at Taman Negara but instead decided there was plenty for me to find nearer by so I headed along the Tabing Trail towards Jenut Muda. The Tabing Trail was as always birdless but as I started Jenut Muda, I enjoyed superb views of 2 Great Slaty Woodpeckers. The rest of the trail was quieter but I did finally see my first Moustached Babblers as well as enjoy good views of Grey-cheeked Bulbul and Rufous-winged Philentoma. A stroll up Bukit Teresek proved fruitless apart from a Streaked Bulbul so I headed back down towards the result. I stopped in the Tahan Hide but there was nothing present but just outside the hide I noticed a nondescript Babbler that turned out to be a rare Horsfield’s Babbler. As I was heading to have a late lunch, I noticed a fruiting tree in the resort full of Bluebirds, Bulbuls and Green Pigeons as well as a Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker.

I was quite hungry so I had a quick lunch before returning to the tree which David had also noticed as he was standing there. After a couple of days where I had seen more than him, David had managed a superb morning seeing both Rufous-bellied Eagle and White-crowned Hornbill so I was quite jealous. Nevertheless, the next hour or so was some of the most productive birding at Taman Negara as the fruiting tree was teeming with birds. New birds were made up of Green Iora, Blue-eared Barbet, Brown Barbet and a stunning male Yellow-rumped Flycatcher but also present were Thick-billed Green Pigeon, Gold-whiskered Barbet, Red-throated Barbet, Black-and-yellow Broadbill and Grey-bellied Bulbul. I thought I saw a Jambu Fruit Dove disappear in to the back but I could not be certain.

Tearing ourselves away, we headed round the Swamp Loop and found Red-tailed Tailorbird, a tick for both of us, and my first Ferruginous Babbler. We returned to the magic tree just before dusk and managed to confirm the presence of a female Jambu Fruit Dove, enjoying good but brief views. I wish I had found this tree earlier so I do recommend to anyone visiting to spend time in the resort itself.

Species list at the end of day 12: 214

Day 13: Friday 24th April 2015 – Taman Negara – Kuala Lumpur Airport (Fruiting tree, Canopy Walkway, Swamp Loop)

I had originally planned to take the 9am boat out but when I heard there was a public bus at 3pm, I decided to maximise my time in Taman Negara. I started the day at the fruiting tree, which was noticeably quieter but did contain my first Yellow-vented Flowerpecker. I then headed to the Canopy Walkway again and spent a couple of hours there but, apart from a Chestnut-breasted Malkoha this was quiet. The walk back was more productive however as I enjoyed a superb Maroon Woodpecker and a long overdue male Tiger Shrike. A final whizz round the Swamp Loop was successful as I saw the last new bird of the trip, a Grey-chested Jungle Flycatcher. I then headed over the river for lunch and the bus to Jerantut.

I intended to use public transport to get me to the airport but when I realised I had a 90 minute wait in Jerantut, I splashed out 300RM for a taxi direct to my hotel. The journey was quiet apart from a couple of feral Milky Storks in Kuala Lumpur and a dark raptor in the failing light that could well have been a Changeable Hawk Eagle.
Species list at the end of Day 13: 218

Day 14: Saturday 25th April 2015 – Kuala Lumpur airport

I had around 40 minutes of daylight at the Concorde Inn before I set off for the airport so I made one last desperate push for new birds. There were plenty of birds including Black-naped Oriole, Asian Koel, Common Myna and Olive-backed Sunbird but I was unable to find anything new. Similarly at the airport, I only managed a couple of Brown Shrikes but I could not complain, it had been a brilliant trip.

Species list at the end of Day 14: 218

Full List of birds seen (lifers in bold)

Ferruginous Partridge
Crested Partridge
Red Junglefowl
Crested Fireback
Great Argus
Little Heron
Chinese Pond Heron
Eastern Cattle Egret
Grey Heron
Purple Heron
Great Egret
Little Egret
Oriental Honey Buzzard
Black-shouldered Kite
Brahminy Kite
White-bellied Sea Eagle
Crested Serpent Eagle
Black Eagle
Blyth’s Hawk Eagle
White-breasted Waterhen
Barred Buttonquail
Red-wattled Lapwing
Feral Pigeon
Spotted Dove
Little Cuckoo-Dove
Emerald Dove
Zebra Dove
Little Green Pigeon
Pink-necked Green Pigeon
Thick-billed Green Pigeon
Jambu Fruit Dove
Mountain Imperial Pigeon
Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot
Greater Coucal
Raffles’ Malkoha
Chestnut-breasted Malkoha
Black-bellied Malkoha
Chestnut-winged Cuckoo
Asian Koel
plaintive Cuckoo
Square-tailed Drongo Cuckoo
Hodgson’s Hawk Cuckoo
Barn Owl
Brown Wood Owl
Large-tailed Nightjar
Grey-rumped Treeswift
Glossy Swiftlet
Germain’s Swiftlet
Silver-backed Needletail
Asian Palm Swift
Black-nest Swiftlet
Fork-tailed Swift
House Swift
Red-headed Trogon
Oriental Dollarbird
Stork-billed Kingfisher
White-throated Kingfisher
Black-capped Kingfisher
Collared Kingfisher
Blue-banded Kingfisher
Blue-eared Kingfisher
Red-bearded Bee-eater
Blue-tailed Bee-eater
Blue-throated Bee-eater
Black Hornbill
Fire-tufted Barbet
Golden-whiskered Barbet
Red-throated Barbet
Black-browed Barbet
Blue-eared Barbet
Coppersmith Barbet
Brown Barbet
Rufous Piculet
White-bellied Woodpecker
Banded Woodpecker
Greater Yellownape
Lesser Yellownape
Laced Woodpecker
Maroon Woodpecker
Rufous Woodpecker
Buff-necked Woodpecker
Buff-rumped Woodpecker
Great Slaty Woodpecker
Black-and-red Broadbill
Long-tailed Broadbill
Black-and-yellow Broadbill
Garnet Pitta  
Blue-winged Pitta  
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike  
Rufous-winged Philentoma  
Common Iora  
Green Iora  
Javan Cuckoo-shrike  
Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike  
Pied Triller  
Grey-chinned Minivet  
Scarlet Minivet  
Mangrove Whistler  
Tiger Shrike  
Brown Shrike  
White-bellied Erponis  
Blyth’s Shrike Babbler  
Black-eared Shrike Babbler  
Dark-naped Oriole  
Black-and-Crimson Oriole  
Square-tailed Drongo  
Bronzed Drongo  
Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo  
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo  
White-throated Fantail  
Pied Fantail  
Black-naped Monarch  
Asian Paradise Flycatcher  
Common Green Magpie  
House Crow  
Large-billed Crow  
Rail-babbler  
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher  
Cinereous Tit  
Sultan Tit  
Black-headed Bulbul  
Black-crested Bulbul  
Grey-bellied Bulbul  
Stripe-throated Bulbul  
Yellow-vented Bulbul  
Olive-winged Bulbul  
Cream-vented Bulbul  
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul  
Spectacled Bulbul  
Ochraceous Bulbul  
Grey-cheeked Bulbul  
Yellow-bellied Bulbul  
Hairy-backed Bulbul  
Buff-vented Bulbul  
Mountain Bulbul  
Streaked Bulbul
Ashy Bulbul
Barn Swallow
Pacific Swallow
Dusky Crag Martin
Rufous-bellied Swallow
Mountain Tailorbird
Arctic Warbler
Eastern Crowned Warbler
Mountain Leaf Warbler
Chestnut-crowned Warbler
Yellow-bellied Prinia
Common Tailorbird
Dark-necked Tailorbird
Rufous-tailed Tailorbird
Ashy Tailorbird
Grey-throated Babbler
Grey-headed Babbler
Black-throated Babbler
Chestnut-winged Babbler
Golden Babbler
Pin-striped Tit-babbler
Mountain Fulvetta
Abbott’s Babbler
Horsfield’s Babbler
Moustached Babbler
Sooty-capped Babbler
Scaly-crowned Babbler
White-chested Babbler
Ferruginous Babbler
Buff-breasted Babbler
Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush
Black Laughingthrush
Malayan Laughingthrush
Blue-winged Minla
Silver-eared Mesia
Long-tailed Sibia
Oriental White-eye
Everett’s White-eye
Asian Fairy Bluebird
Blue Nuthatch
Asian Glossy Starling
Common Hill Myna
Javan Myna
Common Myna
Lesser Shortwing
Oriental Magpie Robin
White-rumped Shama
White-tailed Robin
Slaty-backed Forktail
Brown-chested Jungle Flycatcher
Dark-sided Flycatcher
Brown Flycatcher
Yellow-rumped Flycatcher
Mugimaki Flycatcher
Rufous-chested Flycatcher
Little Pied Flycatcher
Verditer Flycatcher
Hill Blue Flycatcher
Tickell’s Blue Flycatcher
Malaysian Blue Flycatcher
Mangrove Blue Flycatcher
Rufous-browed Flycatcher
Large Niltava
Greater Green Leafbird
Blue-winged Leafbird
Orange-bellied Leafbird
Crimson-breasted Flowerpecker
Yellow-vented Flowerpecker
Plain Flowerpecker
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker
Ruby-cheeked Sunbird
Brown-throated Sunbird
Purple-naped Sunbird
Olive-backed Sunbird
Black-throated Sunbird
Little Spiderhunter
Long-billed Spiderhunter
Streaked Spiderhunter
Tree Sparrow
Baya Weaver
White-rumped Munia
White-headed Munia
Paddyfield Pipit
(Milky Stork)

Birds heard only – n.b. there will be many more but I’m unfamiliar with most calls so these are only the ones I am certain I heard

Collared Owlet
Mountain Scops Owl
Rusty-naped Pitta
Pygmy Wren-babbler
Malaysian Peacock Pheasant
Indian Cuckoo
Banded Broadbill
Chestnut-rumped Babbler
Malayan Banded Pitta
Black Magpie
Rhinoceros Hornbill
Mammals

Cream-coloured (Pale) Giant Squirrel
Black Giant Squirrel
Prevost’s Squirrel
Plantain Squirrel
Black-banded Squirrel
Grey-bellied Squirrel
Slender Squirrel
Western Striped Squirrel
Shrew-faced Ground-squirrel
Lesser Giant Flying Squirrel
Red-cheeked Flying Squirrel
Common Treeshrew
Leopard Cat
Dusky Langur
Silvery Langur
White-thighed Langur
Crab-eating (Long-tailed) Macaque
Yellow-throated Marten
Common Palm Civet
Wild Boar
Lesser Malay Chevrotain
Sambar Deer
(Malayan Tapir)