



Sunlight pierces the forest canopy
on the lower slopes of Mt Kinabalu

Sabah, Borneo

9th – 29th April 2007

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Overview

The aim of our three week trip to Sabah was to see as many speciality birds as possible including the endemics and the more difficult to locate rarities. For most of our stay, birds were either in pairs, breeding, preparing to breed or post breeding, so not much was calling. This notwithstanding, at the end of three weeks we had recorded a total of 288 species including five species of **pitta** seen

well and another heard; we had also managed to locate three pairs of the elusive **Bornean Ground Cuckoo** at sites along the Kinabatangan River and seen a total of four **Bornean Bristleheads** at two sites; we did extremely well with the **broadbill** family and in fact logged seven species including **Hose's** and a pair of **Whitehead's** attending their chicks at a wonderful hanging nest.

By the end of the trip we had ticked off 33 of the current Bornean endemics and a good proportion of the Bornean races and possible future splits. However the highlight of the trip had to be when our excellent Danum Valley guide Wang Kong led us to a site near the Field Centre where we managed to call out a **Giant Pitta**, a seminal moment indeed. It literally just hopped out of a dense forest thicket, circled us, occasionally feeding, and then after high fives and handshakes all round, it came back out for a repeat performance, absolutely amazing. In contrast, some self-control was needed to draw us away from the forest gems to turn our attention to Sabah's many **bulbuls**. In the end we did knuckle down to sorting them out, and an admirable set was seen.

Mammals were also in abundance with seven species of primate including good numbers of the astonishing Proboscis Monkey and at least six sightings of wild Orang-utans. We saw several otters, probably Small-clawed, Colugo (perhaps another primate?), several species of deer and Saltwater Crocodiles. At the resort of Mesilau a wonderful little family of bright orange Malay Weasels crossed the road right in front of us. Night spotlighting also produced several species of civet, Flat-headed Cats and up to thirteen **Buffy Fish Owls**. We also nearly stumbled into a small herd of elephants near the Borneo Rainforest Lodge but were alerted in time by a vigilant Wang Kong. We quietly crept past them, so close we could hear their heavy breathing as they munched on foliage. We concluded that Sabah still has more animals than most countries we have visited previously and all were fairly easy to see which was a real positive.

The success of a trip often largely depends on the preparation and this seemed to be the case for us. For many weeks beforehand, trip reports were perused, emails exchanged, information gathered, and bird songs and calls collected & set up on our mp3 players. Checklists were collated, walkie talkies taken out of storage and laser pointers and lightweight stools purchased. Tactics were discussed over beer, the air tickets bought, and accommodation and certain 'essential' local guides booked. In retrospect, this preparation and hard work helped to make our trip one of the most successful any of us have experienced.

We concentrated on seven main areas in Sabah and divided our three weeks accordingly. Some flexibility was written in, and starting with Sepilok and Kinabatangan meant that some of the key lowland species were under the belt long before we entered the challenging Danum Valley.

Logistics – Weather, contact details, costs, etc etc are given at the end of the report.

Itinerary

Sepilok – Forest close to the Orang-utan Rescue Centre – One night, staying at the Labuk B & B

Target Species: *This site seems to be the easiest place to find Bornean Bristlehead these days*

We were met by Robert Chong at Sandakan Airport early in the afternoon, a trifle dazed from the long flights, and we quickly dropped our bags off at our accommodation in Sepilok. Robert drove us straight to a little-used track through nearby forest and we birded the site for about three hours before dusk. The highlight amongst a good introductory selection of birds was a family party of **Bristleheads** and another visit early the next morning to the same area produced yet more species and probably the same **Bristlehead** family. Great views of a calling **Black-headed Pitta** here quickly ensured that the trip was not to be **pitta**-less, and awesome views of three **Great Slaty Woodpeckers** were memorable.

A farcical search for a calling **Barred Eagle Owl** on our first evening ended when AM realised his mp3 player was switched on and the supposedly distant call was actually emanating from his pocket. Blame it on the jet lag!

Sadly, a three hour journey to the Kinabatangan River in the heat of the day only passed through miles and miles of Palm Oil plantations. We saw virtually no other species of tree, no birds and certainly no forest until we were off the main highway and well down the turnoff to Sukau and the Kinabatangan River.

Kinabatangan River – Three nights staying at the Kinabatangan Jungle Camp

Target Species: *White-fronted Falconet, Storm's Stork, Lesser Adjutant, Bornean Ground Cuckoo, six hornbill species, Blue-headed and Black-headed Pittas. Giant Pitta occurs...*

A small motor boat took us from a jetty to the Kinabatangan Jungle Camp, about five kilometres down-river. The camp is owned by Robert and is situated close to prime **ground cuckoo** habitat. We spent the next three days travelling up and down the river in the boat, quietly cruising into several small tributaries, and had excellent views of two pairs, glimpsed another pair and heard another single – we were very lucky.

We saw **Hooded Pitta**, a superb male **Blue-headed Pitta** and five species of **hornbill**. We had at least ten sightings of **Storm's Storks**, several **Lesser Adjutants** and views of crocodiles lazing along the banks of the Kinabatangan River. Two evenings were also spent spotlighting along the riverbanks where incredibly close views of **Buffy Fish Owls** were easy and several species of mammal located. Plenty of other good birds were seen and the Kinabatangan River makes a perfect start to a Sabah tour.



A Kinabatangan tributary –
prime ground cuckoo country

An afternoon trip to the Gomantong Caves nearby

Target Species: Edible, Mossy and Black Nest Swiftlets on nests, plus Bat Hawk

On one of the afternoons we drove back to the Gomantong Caves (just short of the main highway) and spent an hour inside the huge ancient cave – trying not to choke from the fumes. We were able to view all three species of **swiftlet** sitting on appropriate nests (surrounded by gruesome insects with bodies bigger than the **swiftlets**). Once outside we breathed fresh air again. As sunset approached, **Bat Hawks** soared and swerved overhead catching bats with incredible agility.

Borneo Rainforest Lodge in the Danum Valley – Three nights

Target species: White-fronted Falconet, Chestnut-napped Forktail, Great-billed Heron, Great Argus and Crested Fireback, partridges, hornbills, pittas, flycatchers, wren-babblers, flowerpeckers, babblers, trogons, broadbills... You get the idea

After a final Kinabatangan boat trip from dawn, Robert's driver dropped us at the main highway (the 'Sukau Junction'), and as arranged we were picked up by a BRL driver in a smart four by four. He drove us to the town of Lahad Datu where we registered and paid our Danum costs at the BRL office. After a quick bowl of noodles in the town we headed off on the three hour journey to the lodge, arriving late in the afternoon. We spent the next three days walking the various trails with our guide Wang Kong who knew most of the bird calls well.

On one of the days we struggled up to the viewpoint on the top of the hill overlooking the lodge. Further on, close to Serpent Falls we carefully followed a male **Blue-banded Pitta's** calls through the forest for about an hour until we finally had excellent views of this stunning little bird. There were also **Great Argus** dancing grounds on or near several of the trails and several birds

were seen; **Crested Firebacks** roosted near our rooms overnight; both endemic lowland **wren-babblers** put in appearances; and wild Orang-utans were seen on five occasions in the forest, with two females seen constructing a night nest while their infants looked on.



The forest-shrouded
Segama River at BRL

WN and CW also had a close encounter with a small herd of elephants on the East Trail, which increased adrenaline levels for a short time. A spotlighting trip from the back of the BRL truck gave us Civet Cats, Sambah Deer and Flying Squirrels. Two or three **Giant Pittas** were heard at BRL but each was brief and none came close. Our only view of a **Helmeted Hornbill** was much appreciated on the Danum Trail here, but **White-crowned** was to elude us throughout.

See www.borneorainforestlodge.net for more BRL info and photographs.

Danum Valley Field Centre – Four nights

Target Species: In addition to the BRL targets, *Bulwer's Pheasant* (!)

We were advised that a guide is compulsory at DVFC and we were pleased to discover that Wang Kong was able to join us for our four days. If we had to have a guide, it may as well be one who knows the birds well... Seeing **Giant Pitta** on our first morning was an obvious highlight at DVFC. We had prolonged, close views of a female bird after a 30 minute walk up the Tembeling Waterfall Trail.



DVFC

Unfortunately an eleven hour trek up, up and down the Rhino Ridge Trail on one day only succeeded in getting us stung by bees, surrounded by millions of young millipedes and bitten by leeches – but it did not get us **Bulwer's Pheasant**. Nevertheless we heard the only **Banded**

Pitta for the trip calling just before a heavy rainstorm but due to the downpour our chances of seeing it were simply washed away. A good view of another male **Blue-headed Pitta** was highlight of the day.

Fantastic **Red-bearded Bee-eaters**, **Chestnut-naped Forktails**, **Green Broadbills** and **Banded Kingfishers** were also seen on other days, and better views of **Bornean Wren-babbler** obtained. Several **Black-headed Pittas** were heard and one was seen briefly not long before 'the' **Giant Pitta** episode.

On the last day we booked a vehicle at the office to take us to the wonderfully parochial Lahad Datu airport from which we flew back to Kota Kinabalu, a journey of only an hour. We picked up our hire car – an amusingly named Proton Waja – and spent the night in the Berjaya Palace Hotel, dining out in the town. Good food, a relaxing massage and premiership football on satellite made for a great evening. Then very early the next morning we set off for the Rafflesia Centre, an easy 90 minute drive.

Rafflesia Centre – Two early morning visits en route to other areas

Target Species: Mountain Serpent Eagle, partridges, Mountain and Bornean Barbets, Bornean Bulbul, Blue-winged (Kinabalu) Leafbird, Bornean and Whitehead's Spiderhunters, and Whitehead's Broadbill

On arrival we birded along the road and then walked down the very steep forest trail once the centre had opened for the day. The birding was slow and several of the specialities could not be found, not least **Whitehead's Spiderhunter**. We returned en route back to KK a week later when we did manage to see most of the target species, though we had to leave Sabah with just two out of three of the **Whitehead's** trio. No Rafflesia flowers were blooming on either visit, just their immature buds on the forest floor being evidence of their presence.

Poring Hot Springs – Three nights staying in the River Lodge

Target Species: Banded and Blue-banded Pittas, Rufous-collared Kingfisher, Hose's Broadbill, Chestnut-capped Thrush, Cinnamon-rumped Trogon, Jambu Fruitdove and Bornean Spiderhunter

We drove the Waja across the badly degraded road from the Rafflesia Centre to Poring where we checked into a very pleasant bungalow called River Lodge right by the bridge over the sulphur river. We had two half days and one full day on site. We twice birded the Langanan Waterfall Trail and on the last day also spent time on the Canopy Walkway, which turned out to be quite productive. An open area just a 100m on from the tourist bathing pools towards the Waterfall Trail produced fleeting views of a **Hose's Broadbill** – yet another fantastic bird for the trip but only three of us were fortunate enough to see it.

Poring is a tricky site. It holds a few high quality species but all are very difficult to find. We were pleased with what we saw over two days and really enjoyed the site, not least the great accommodation and food.

Mt Kinabalu Park Headquarters – Three nights in the Liwagu Suite and two nights at Peak Lodge

Target Species Headquarters Area: Mountain Wren Babbler, Red-breasted and Crimson-headed Partridges, Whitehead's Trogon, Broadbill and Spiderhunter; Bornean Whistling Thrush, Everett's Thrush, White-browed Shortwing, Bornean Stubtail, Kinabalu Jungle

Flycatcher, Short-tailed Magpie, Black-breasted Fruithunter, Temminck's Babbler, Temminck's Sunbird, Black-capped White-Eye and Bornean Treepie

We drove to the Mt. Kinabalu National Park HQ where we checked into the Liwagu Lodge. A fruiting tree directly outside the veranda immediately produced several new species including **Temminck's Sunbird**. We spent the next four days walking most of the trails, some several times, and managed to see most of the target species. **Everett's Thrush** proved maddening and in the end only AM had a fleeting glimpse of what may have been the bird – not for want of trying though. The **Fruithunter** also proved difficult and by the end of our visit only three of us had had acceptable views.



Mt Kinabalu – much loved by birders, much photographed by all

Mesilau – A morning visit from Mt. Kinabalu

Target High Mountain Species: Flavescent Bulbul, Mountain Serpent Eagle, Friendly Bush Warbler, Mountain Wren Babbler and Mountain Black-eye

The decision was finally made to drive over early one morning to the Mesilau Resort further round the mountain, and to walk to the higher altitudes of Mt. Kinabalu from there. The trail was perhaps quieter than back at the HQ and started at a higher altitude. We only had to climb 1.5kms before we heard the call of a **Friendly Bush Warbler**. However it was not as friendly or obliging as we would have liked and it took an hour before all four of us had good views.



Pitcher plants at Mesilau

We also had excellent views of **Sunda Bush Warbler** and at one point we were able to tempt one little bird out to within a foot of an outstretched hand.

Mountain Wren-babbler also showed well, and our only views were on the summit trail here. We decided not to climb any higher and therefore did not see **Island Thrush**.

Mountain Black-eye was easy to see around the resort itself.

Kota Kinabalu City (via Rafflesia Centre) – Likas Bay and the Kinabalu Wetland Centre

Target species: Chinese Egret and mangrove species

On the last morning we left Mt. Kinabalu at 3am in order to get to the Rafflesia Centre for dawn. This time we were able to get good views of several of the missing species including **Mountain Serpent Eagle, Blue-winged (Kinabalu) Leafbird, Bornean Bulbul** and flight views of several probable **Whitehead's Spiderhunters**. Frustrating to say the least.

We then drove back to Kota Kinabalu and spent the last half day birding the ponds along the sea front at Likas Bay and finally the Kinabalu Wetland Centre before heading to the airport for the flights home. A **Chinese Egret** seen on a large lagoon was a nice quality bird on which to end our trip.

Systematic Trip List

S = Sepilok

KR = Kinabatangan River

GC = Gomantong Caves

BRL = Borneo Rainforest lodge

DVFC = Danum Valley Field Centre

RC = Rafflesia Centre

PHS – Poring Hot Springs

MtK = Mt Kinabalu

M = Mesilau

KK = Kota Kinabalu

LB = Likas Bay

KWC= Kinabalu Wetland Centre

E = Endemic

NE = Near Endemic

FS = Future Split

SR = Separate Race

R = Rare & therefore a target

Darter – Four at S, 18 at KR, two at BRL and one at DVFC

Great-billed Heron – R – One at BRL flying along the river seen from the veranda of the restaurant

Purple Heron – One at S, six at KR, 20+ at a heronry in KK

Great Egret – Five + en route to KR, ten+ KR, one at DVFC, one at MtK, 20+ in KK

Little Egret – One at S, several KK

Chinese Egret – One on the largest lagoon at Likas Bay in KK

Pacific Reef Egret – One by river at Likas Bay in KK

Cattle Egret – Seen en route to S, at KR, DVFC and KK

Striated Heron – Several seen along the KR and one at KWC

Black-crowned Night Heron – Several at S and KR and one at PHS

Yellow Bittern – Two at KWC

Storm's Stork – NE – Up to five seen each day from the boat at KR

Lesser Adjutant – R – Singles on two days and two on one day seen soaring at KR

Jerdon's Baza – One at DVFC

Oriental Honey Buzzard – Singles at DVFC and RC

Bat Hawk – Up to three at GC and a single at BRL

Black-shouldered Kite – A single bird at KK airport

Brahminy Kite – Up to three at S and KR on four days, and a single at DVFC

White-bellied Sea Eagle – Singles at KR on three days

Lesser Fish Eagle – One at KR and one at DVFC

Grey-headed Fish Eagle – Two sightings at KR

Mountain Serpent Eagle – R – One at MtK from the Kiaw View Trail and one overhead from the road at RC

Crested Serpent Eagle – SR – Up to four each day at KR, singles at BRL

Crested Goshawk – Singles at KR on two days

Chinese Goshawk – A probable at PHS

Japanese Sparrowhawk – A probable at PHS

Black Eagle – One at MtK

Rufous-bellied Eagle – Singles on two days at DVFC

Changeable Hawk Eagle – A bird seen at S was probably this species

Blyth's Hawk Eagle – One at RC

Wallace's Hawk Eagle – Singles and pairs at KR

Peregrine Falcon – A single at MtK was of the race *ernesti*

Chestnut-necklaced Partridge – One heard only at KR

Red-breasted Partridge – R – Heard at MtK, RC and BRL, and two pairs seen at MtK at the top of the Bukit Ulah Trail

Crimson-headed Partridge – E – Heard at MtK and RC, and a pair seen on the last day close to the road at the beginning of the Silau Silau Trail, MtK

Crested Fireback – SR – Pairs seen on several days at BRL – one roosting by the accommodation

Great Argus – NE – Heard every day in the lowlands and several seen with little effort at BRL and DVFC including two displaying

White-breasted Waterhen – mostly seen singly at KR, one en route to Mesilau and common at LB

Purple Swampfen – Several pairs at LB

Common Moorhen – Common at LB

Wood Sandpiper – A single at Lahad Datu airport

Common Sandpiper – Several seen each day at KR with 11 at the river at BRL and singles at LB and S

Greater Crested Tern – A single bird at LB

Whiskered Tern – Two birds at LB

Spotted Dove – Small numbers every day when travelling the highways and in KK

Little Cuckoo Dove – Flocks of up to 20 seen in fruiting trees at PHS and MtK

Emerald Dove – single birds at KR and PHS

Zebra Dove – Up to four at LB and KWC

Little Green Pigeon – Pairs and a small family party at KR and a single bird at KWC

Pink-necked Pigeon – singles at KR, and three at the KWC

Cinnamon-headed Pigeon – A single at KR

Thick-billed Pigeon – a pair from the Canopy walk at PHS

Large Green Pigeon – A single in treetops at DVFC

Green Imperial Pigeon – A flock at KR, pairs and singles at BRL, DVFC and RC

Mt. Imperial Pigeon – singles at PHS and MtK on several days

Long-tailed Parakeet – Pairs and flocks of up to eight at KR on four days

Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot – Singles and pairs at KR, DVFC and PHS

Indian Cuckoo – Heard in most areas and one seen at KR

Oriental Cuckoo – Heard and one seen at MtK

Violet Cuckoo – A male seen flying over at DVFC

Drongo-cuckoo – Heard in most areas, two seen at KR

Asian Koel – Heard at airport in KK, also at LB

Chestnut-bellied Malkoha – SR – Fairly common, seen singly and in pairs at KR, BRL, DVFC and PHS

Raffles Malkoha – singles at KR, pairs in DVFC and PHS

Bornean Ground Cuckoo – E – Three pairs seen from the boat at KR and another bird heard

Greater Coucal – very common – heard most days in all areas except MtK

Buffy Fish Owl – Up to ten birds seen with spotlights along the KR on two evenings

Brown Wood Owl – SR – One seen on a walk around the Kinabatangan Jungle Camp trail and another close to the main building from the entrance road at BRL

Collared (Pygmy) Owlet – A single bird seen at a nest hole at RC

Large-tailed Nightjar – One heard at Sepilok

Glossy Swiftlet – Swiftlets with pale rumps seen at all sites were identified as this species

Mossy–nest Swiftlet – This species was no doubt amongst the myriad of swiftlets soaring around at most sites. Several seen on nests at the GC.

Black–nest Swiftlet – As above and also seen on nests at GC

Edible–nest Swiftlets – As above and also seen on nests at GC

Silver–rumped Needletail – A few seen at Danum

Brown–backed Needletail – Up to seven seen at KR and singles at the DVFC

Asian Palm Swift – Singles and a pair seen at KR

Little Swift – Several at S and KK

Grey–rumped Treeswift – Two from the car en route from RC to PHS. Four also en route to KK.

Whiskered Treeswift – Pairs and small parties seen at KR, BRL, DVFC and PHS.

Red–naped Trogon – A single bird at KR and one at BRL

Diard's Trogon – Several seen at BRL and DVFC

Whitehead's Trogon – E – Excellent views of a pair along the Silau Silau Trail at MtK

Cinnamon–rumped Trogon – R – A call at PHS but we did not see the bird

Scarlet–rumped Trogon – Heard several times and seen KR, BRL and DVFC

Common Kingfisher – Singles at S, KR and one at BRL

Blue–eared Kingfisher – One or two pairs at KR and a single at BRL

Blue–banded Kingfisher – Three quick glimpses of a small kingfisher with a very pale back, two at BRL and one en route from DVFC was probably this species

Black–backed Kingfisher – Glimpses at KR, singles and a pair at BRL

Banded Kingfisher – Heard at BRL, glimpsed and heard at DVFC and a fine male finally seen well

Stork–billed Kingfisher – Seen at KR each day, singles at BRL and DVFC

Ruddy Kingfisher – A quick glimpse of a brightly coloured kingfisher at a pool in the forest at BRL was probably this species

Collared kingfisher – A common bird of roadside, cultivated areas

Rufous–collared Kingfisher – SR – Two pairs were seen at PHS, one by the entrance to the Canopy Walkway and one near the bat cave on the Waterfall Trail

Red–bearded Bee–eater – A single bird at DVFC was our only sighting of this splendid bird

Blue–throated Bee–eater – Singles and a pair seen in open areas at KR and DVFC

Blue–tailed Bee–eater – Several seen at S

Dollarbird – Singles and pairs seen at KR and DVFC

Oriental Pied Hornbill – Good numbers seen at KR including 30 in one flock

Asian Black Hornbill – Singles and small groups at KR and a pair at DVFC

Rhinoceros Hornbill – Two's and threes at KR, also at BRL and DVFC

Helmeted Hornbill – The maniacal laugh of this bird was heard often and finally a single bird seen at BRL. If you link up with Wang Kong, make sure he does his impression for you...

Bushy-crested Hornbill – Small parties and also a large flock of 14+ at BRL, also pairs at DVFC

Wrinkled Hornbill – Pairs at KR on three days, also a pair at DVFC

Wreathed Hornbill – A pair at KR and a pair at PHS

Gold-whiskered Barbet – Heard and 1 seen at BRL, heard only at DVFC and PHS

Red-throated Barbet – A pair at PHS

Mountain Barbet – E – Two seen at RC

Yellow-crowned Barbet – One seen at PHS

Golden-naped Barbet – E – Heard every day at DVFC and one seen, heard and a couple seen at MtK

Blue-eared Barbet – Heard at KR, BRL, DVFC, PHS and one seen here. Also heard at MtK.

Bornean Barbet – E – A glimpse of two at RC, the call confirming the sighting

Brown Barbet – SR – Several at S, a single at PHS and also heard there on the second visit

Rufous Piculet – A single bird at S, a pair at BRL and another single at DVFC

Grey-capped Woodpecker – A single bird at DVFC

Rufous Woodpecker – A single bird and two pairs seen at PHS

White-bellied Woodpecker – Heard and a then a pair seen at KR, also two pairs at BRL

Banded Woodpecker – A single at PHS

Olive-backed Woodpecker – A single at DVFC

Maroon Woodpecker – A single at BRL, another at PHS and several at MtK

Orange-backed Woodpecker – A single at PHS and also a pair at MtK

Buff-rumped Woodpecker – Three at DVFC, a single and a pair at PHS

Buff-necked Woodpecker – A pair at KR and a single at DVFC

Grey and Buff Woodpecker – Singles at KR on two days and another single at DVFC

Great Slaty Woodpecker – A family party of three at S, and one at KR

Dusky Broadbill – A flock of at least seven at KR was the only sighting

Black and Red Broadbill – Fairly common, up to six seen each day at KR, pairs on three days at BRL and DVFC

Banded Broadbill – A single at KR, two pairs at BRL and a single at PHS

Black and Yellow Broadbill – Fairly common, several pairs on three days at S & KR, also up to four on two days at BRL, four at DVFC and singles at PHS

Green Broadbill – A male seen in the grids at DVFC

Hose's Broadbill – E – A single bird at Poring from the open area at the beginning of the Waterfall Trail was the only sighting

Whitehead's Broadbill – E – A breeding pair with two chicks in a hanging nest by the side of the road at MtK, also another pair heard along the Bukit Ulah Trail at MtK

Giant Pitta – R – A female called out on the Tembeling Waterfall Trail at DVFC was a very exciting find. Several also heard at BRL.

Banded Pitta – FS – A single bird heard calling on the Rhino Ridge just before a sudden heavy rainstorm and the bird was not heard again once the rain stopped

Blue-headed Pitta – E – Single males seen at KR and DVFC, and another heard at DVFC

Hooded Pitta – Heard and two seen at KR, also heard at DVFC

Blue-banded Pitta – E – A male seen close to the Serpent Falls at BRL, a trip highlight of course

Black-headed Pitta –E – (split from Garnet) One seen at KR, also heard there. One seen at DVFC, and heard every day there and at BRL.

Barn Swallow – Small numbers seen at S and at KR

Pacific Swallow – Fairly common at S, KR BRL, DVFC and in KK

Yellow Wagtail – Singles at KR on three days

Grey Wagtail – A single bird en route from RC to PHS

Richards Pipit – Up to four at Lahad Datu Airport and another at KB

Black-faced (Sunda) Cuckoo-shrike – a single at MtK

Bar-bellied Cuckoo-shrike – Up to six seen flying over at DVFC

Lesser Cuckoo-shrike – Singles at KR, DVFC and at PHS on two days

Pied Triller – A single bird at LB

Fiery Minivet – A male at KR, and pairs at BRL and DVFC

Grey-chinned Minivet – Pairs at PHS on two days, small flocks and a flock of ten at MtK on three days

Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike – A single at LB

Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike – Singles on three days at KR

Large Wood-shrike – One at KR and another at PHS

Straw-headed Bulbul – a pair at KR

Black-headed Bulbul – Two pairs at KR and several sightings at PHS

Bornean Bulbul – E – (split from Black-headed) – One bird at DVFC and three at RC

Flavescent Bulbul – A single and up to five at MtK & M

Yellow-vented Bulbul – Fairly common at S and KR, also seen in small numbers at BRL, DVFC, PHS and in KK

Olive-winged Bulbul – A single at KR and another at DVFC

Red-eyed Bulbul – Fairly common at S and KR, singles at BRL and a single and a pair at DVFC

Spectacled Bulbul – Singles at DVFC, RC and a single and a pair at PHS

Finsch's Bulbul – Singles on two days at BRL

Ochraceous Bulbul – A single and a pair at PHS, singles and a pair with young seen several times on the Silau Silau Trail at MtK

Grey-cheeked Bulbul – Singles at BRL and DVFC

Yellow-bellied Bulbul – Singles at BRL, DVFC and pairs at PHS on two days

Hairy-backed Bulbul – Singles and pairs at BRL, DVFC and PHS

Buff-vented Bulbul – A single at S was the only sighting

Streaked Bulbul – A single at BRL and a pair feeding two young at PHS.

Ashy Bulbul – SR – A pair were finally identified at RC on the last day

Greater Green Leafbird – Singles and pairs on several days at BRL, DVFC and RC

Lesser Green Leafbird – Seen in pairs and small numbers at BRL, DVFC and PHS

Kinabalu (Blue-winged) Leafbird – FS – We finally caught up with this recently split endemic at RC on our last day

Common lora – A pair at KR and a single at BRL

Green lora – A male, a separate female and a pair at KR

Bornean Whistling Thrush – E – Fairly common at MtK, up to five seen every day

Everett's Thrush – E – One of our party had a glimpse of a thrush along the Bukit Ulah Trail on one occasion but was unable to claim it as a definite sighting. A bird singing at dusk along Silau Silau may have been ET.

White-browed Shortwing – SR – This species was singing on almost every path at MtK and we all had separate sightings on many occasions

Yellow-bellied Prinia – A fairly common resident of grassy or scrubby areas in all places we visited, mostly seen singing from grassy perches

Bornean Stubtail – E – This species was singing on all trails at MtK (for those of us who could hear such high-pitched sounds). Seen a few times.

Mt. (Sunda) Bush Warbler – SR – This obliging little bird was heard almost constantly whenever passing scrubby areas at the edge of the MtK forest. Also common at M where the rainforest changed to mountain scrub – up to ten at M in four hours.

Friendly Bush Warbler – E – A pair taped and pished out of the scrubby forest at Mesilau was the only sighting. The birds came really close but were so skulking that they were still a real struggle to actually see and two attempts an hour apart were necessary before all of us had acceptable views.

Oriental (Great) Reed Warbler – A single bird at KR

Mt Tailorbird – Fairly common at MtK with up to five birds seen on one day

Dark-necked Tailorbird – A single at KR was the only sighting

Rufous-tailed Tailorbird – singles and pairs seen at S, KR, BRL

Ashy Tailorbird – Seen in singles and pairs at S, KR, DVFC and PHS

Arctic Warbler – Two birds seen, one at BRL and one at DVFC

Mt. Leaf Warbler – Seen singly and in pairs at MtK – on four days

Yellow-breasted Warbler – Fairly common at MtK, seen and heard, singly and in pairs on all five days

Yellow-bellied Warbler – A single bird at PHS

Striated Grassbird – Several seen at Lahad Datu airport

Grey-chested Jungle-flycatcher – A single bird at DVFC

Kinabalu (Eye-browed) Jungle-flycatcher – E – A couple seen along the Silau Silau Trail at MtK, and one on Bukit Ulah

Asian Brown Flycatcher – Singles seen at S, KR, BRL, DVFC and PHS

Narcissus Flycatcher – A single stunning male in the Grid at DVFC was the only sighting

Snowy-browed Flycatcher – Pairs seen on four days at MtK

Little Pied Flycatcher – Singles, pairs and up to four seen each day at MtK

Verditer Flycatcher – Singles at S, DVFC and PHS

Indigo Flycatcher – A pair seen often around the Liwagu Restaurant at MtK, also other pairs in the forest there

White-tailed Flycatcher – A pair seen twice by the first stream along the Waterfall Trail at PHS

Hill Blue Flycatcher – A single at BRL and possibly another at MtK

Large-billed Blue Flycatcher – A pair at BRL and a pair and a single at DVFC

Malaysian Blue Flycatcher – Several pairs at KR and a single at BRL

Bornean Blue Flycatcher – E – Singles at BRL and a single and a pair at DVFC

Grey-headed Flycatcher – NE – Fairly common, heard at KR and heard and seen at BRL and DVFC

Magpie Robin – Fairly common at S, and KR, also at DVFC, PHS and around the restaurant at MtK

White-browed Shama – E – Fairly common, seen and heard almost every day at S, KR, BRL, DVFC and PHS

Rufous-tailed Shama – A single bird along the Rhino ridge Trail was the only sighting

Chestnut-naped Forktail – A bird seen several times by the small bridge close to DVFC

White-crowned Forktail – SR – Fairly common singly, in pairs and with young along the Silau Silau Trail at MtK and at PHS

Black-breasted Fruithunter – E – This bird was glimpsed on two occasions at MtK with views varying from null to OK. We found this bird very elusive and difficult to see, and it may well have been easier if there had been more fruiting trees.

White-throated Fantail – A single at KR, up to four pairs on one day at MtK

Pied Fantail – Pairs at KR, on three days, a single at BRL, singles, a pair and up to three at DVFC and at least eight at the KWC

Spotted Fantail – A single bird at DVFC was the only sighting

Black-naped Monarch – Singles, pairs and up to eight seen at S and KR on six days

Maroon-breasted Philentoma – A single at PHS

Rufous-winged Philentoma – A single at BRL and a single and a pair at DVFC

Asian Paradise Flycatcher – Several sightings at KR and one at BRL and a white phase male at DVFC

Mangrove Whistler – A single bird at PHS

Bornean Whistler – E – We had sightings of up to six birds on several trails on five days at MtK

Sunda Laughing Thrush – Several sightings of three parties of birds at MtK

Bare-headed Laughing Thrush – E – A glimpse of one bird at PHS and a pair by the Liwagu Restaurant at MtK

Chestnut-capped Laughing Thrush – Fairly common in small parties at MtK

White-chested Babbler – Singles and small groups at KR, BRL and DVFC

Ferruginous Babbler – A single bird spotted by Wang Kong was the only sighting

Abbott's Babbler – A pair at KR

Horsfield's Babbler – Possibly glimpsed at BRL but a pair at the Grid at the DVFC were positively identified

Short-tailed Babbler – Possibly glimpsed at BRL but singles at DVFC and another at PHS

Temminck's Babbler – E – A couple seen near the Liwagu Restaurant at MtK

Black-capped Babbler – Seen at KR, GC and DVFC, also heard at BRL

Moustached Babbler – singles and pairs at BRL, DVFC and PHS

Sooty-capped Babbler – Pairs at S, BRL and DVFC

Scaly-crowned Babbler – Singles and pairs on five days at BRL and DVFC

Rufous-crowned Babbler – A pair at BRL, a single at DVFC and a pair at PHS

Chestnut-backed Scimitar-Babbler – Pairs at BRL, DVFC on two days and a pair at PHS

Bornean Wren-Babbler – E – A glimpse of two birds calling near the Canopy Walkway at BRL, and finally seen well with Wang Kong's help on the Tembeling Trail at DVFC

Striped Wren-Babbler – Two seen at BRL

Black-throated Wren-Babbler – E – A pair at BRL near the Canopy Walkway

Mt. Wren Babbler – A pair seen plus several heard at M

Grey-throated Babbler – Fairly common in small parties at MtK

Grey-headed Babbler – A pair with young at BRL

Chestnut-rumped Babbler – Several sightings of up to four birds at DVFC

Chestnut-winged Babbler – Fairly common in small parties at KR, also heard at BRL and DVFC and a pair seen at DVFC

Striped Tit-Babbler – Fairly common in small parties at BRL, DVFC and PHS. Also seen at LB. Their call is heard more often than the bird is seen.

White-browed Shrike-Babbler – Singles and up to three seen on three days at MtK

Brown Fulvetta – Heard at BRL, three seen from the Canopy Walk at PHS

Chestnut-crested Yuhina – E – Four seen at RC. Common in quite large flocks at MtK.

White-bellied Yuhina – A pair seen by only two of our group at BRL

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch – singles seen at KR, BRL, DVFC and a single and pair at MtK

Ruby-cheeked Sunbird – singles at KR on three days, singles at BRL and a pair with young at DVFC

Plain Sunbird – singles on three days and three feeding in a flowering tree from the veranda at DVFC

Plain-throated Sunbird – Pairs at S, KR and a family party at PHS

Purple-naped Sunbird – Two males at BRL and another at DVFC

Olive-backed Sunbird – singles on three days at KR, also singles at DVFC, RC and PHS and at least two at KWC

Crimson Sunbird – singles on three days at KR, also a pair at DVFC

Temminck's Sunbird – Up to ten birds each day at MtK feeding in flowering trees watched from the balcony of our accommodation at Liwagu Suites

Spectacled Spiderhunter – Several flypasts were probably this species but good views only of one at BRL

Little Spiderhunter – Pairs and singles at KR on four days, also singles at BRL and one at DVFC

Yellow-eared Spiderhunter – A glimpse of a bird at BRL was possibly this species

Grey-breasted Spiderhunter – singles at BRL and DVFC

Bornean Spiderhunter – E – Up to five at PHS and a single the next day

Whitehead's Spiderhunter – E – Several flight views of distant large spiderhunters could have involved this species

Yellow-breasted Flowerpecker – A single at BRL and a male at DVFC

Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker – E – Several at BRL, pairs and singles on four days at DVFC

Yellow-vented Flowerpecker – Singles on three days at BRL and one at PHS

Orange-bellied Flowerpecker – up to three at KR, one at DVFC and several at PHS

Black-sided Flowerpecker – E – Several at RC on both visits, also singles & a pair at MtK, and M

Black-capped White-eye – NE – A single at RC, and quite common with at least five on four days at MtK

Everett's White-eye – A single bird in bamboo on the Waterfall Trail at PHS was the only sighting

Mountain Black-eye – E – Three sightings of singles and pairs at MtK and M

Dark-throated Oriole – A pair and a single at DVFC also a pair at PHS

Black-naped Oriole – A single at S and KK

Black-hooded Oriole – A single at PHS

Asian Fairy Bluebird – Singles KR, a pair at BRL, up to three at DVFC and several singles at PHS

Brown Shrike – One seen on roadside wires en route to BRL

Ashy Drongo – SR – A single at PHS, and several pairs at MtK

Crow-billed Drongo – A single at S

Hair-crested Drongo – A single bird and a family with two fledglings seen on two days at MtK

Greater Racket-tailed Drongo – A pair and a single at KR, also another pair at DVFC

White-breasted Woodswallow – Singles at KR and several pairs at PHS

Crested Jay – SR – Elusive single birds seen at BRL, DVFC and PHS

Bornean Black Magpie – FS – A pair at KR and singles at DVFC on four days

Short-tailed Magpie – A single in the forest at MtK and a pair building a nest there near the Liwagu Lodges

Bornean Treepie – E – Singles at BRL and PHS and fairly common at MtK with up to eight on one day

Slender-billed Crow – Fairly common at KR, small flocks over at BRL and DVFC

Bornean Bristlehead – E – Three at S on two days. Also a single bird close to DVFC.

Asian Glossy Starling – Common at S, KR, also several at the village near DVFC and common in KK

Hill Myna – a pair at KR and up to four at DVFC

Crested Myna – Fairly common in small numbers at S, KR and a single bird on roadside wires en route from RC to PHS

Red Avadavat – A small flock flying away at LB were probably avadavats

Dusky Munia – E – Fairly common at S, KR, BRL, DVFC, PHS and LB

White-bellied Munia – A flock of up to eight at S

Black-headed Munia – Common at S, several at DVFC and also at LB

Eurasian Tree Sparrow – Fairly common at S, KR, BRL, one at DVFC, a flock at M and fairly common in KK

Other Dips

White-fronted Falconet – E – We checked all the bare snags along the roads to Sukau and Danum but none sighted

Bulwer's Pheasant – E – Although we spent 11 hours walking the Rhino Ridge at DVFC we did not even hear this species

Cinnamon-rumped Trogon – R – Heard only at PHS

White-crowned Hornbill – Should have been at KR and Danum but not in evidence – may have been breeding

Chestnut-capped Thrush – R – We thought we heard this bird at the top of the Waterfall Trail at PHS but we eventually had to admit defeat

Weather

Generally hot and dry in the lowlands with just a couple of notable downpours. Cooler on the mountain with just a little birding time lost to rain or fog on one or two afternoons.

Accommodation and Contact Details

Sepilok – Labuk B and B – very adequate, comfortable rooms with or without ensuite and fan, and very good value. Approximately GBP10 per person per night.

Jalan Rambutan PO Box 555, 90706 Sandakan, Sabah

Email:– labukbb@tm.net.my Website:– www.labukbb@yahoo.com

Tel:– 089 533 190, 089 220 299

Kinabatangan Jungle Camp – very comfortable twin rooms with en suite and overhead fans right in the rainforest but separate from the restaurant building, all built along the edge of the Kinabatangan River. Email – as above. The complete Kinabatangan package approximated to GBP60 per person per day including full board, road transfers, boat trips and guiding.

Danum Valley

– **Borneo Rainforest Lodge** – Terribly smart resort hotel, very expensive by Asian birding standards. Excellent large rooms with ensuite and overhead fan. Wonderful buffet style meals including afternoon teas. Large open veranda with views over the river, an extremely pleasant place. Our package worked out at approximately GBP85 per person per day including full board, road transfers and guiding.

– **Danum Valley Field Centre** – Fairly basic rooms but with ensuite and fans, expensive but still half the price of BRL. Institution type meals were more than adequate. A great veranda and coffee on tap. The daily package rate here was approximately GBP45 pppd.

Both booked through Borneo Nature Tours, Km 78, Jalan Danum, Lahad Datu, PO Box 61174, 91120, Lahad Datu, Sabah, Malaysia. Tel:– 6 089 841107

Email:– info@borneonaturetours.com

Prebook your guides here too.

Rafflesia Centre – We didn't stay here but there is a 'resort hotel' about five Kms away on the KK side.

Hotel Gunung Emas – (Gunung Alab Resort Sdn Bhd)

Tel: 019 531 9818 or 019 870 0162 Website:– not as yet set up.

The rooms are pretty basic but very inexpensive – about £20 a night for a triple with ensuite, no shower though just buckets of hot water. Basis restaurant downstairs.

Poring Hot Springs – We stayed in a very pleasant bungalow with luxurious, ensuite bathrooms, a sitting room and a veranda. Very good value.

Mt Kinabalu Park – We stayed firstly in two Liwagu Suites (everything else was booked up). We then moved to a bungalow called Peak Lodge which had bedrooms, a bathroom, a sitting room and a large veranda right across the front with fabulous views of Mt Kinabalu. Very good value.

Both PHS and MtK booked through Sutera Sanctuary Lodges, G15 Grd Floor Wisma Sabah, 88000 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia

Tel:– 6 088 243629

Email:– info@suterasanctuarlodges.com

Website:– www.suterasanctuarlodges.com

The rates were very reasonable, approximately GBP15 pppd including evening meals.

Kota Kinabalu City – Berjaya Palace – 1 Jalan Tangki, Aramuning 88992, Kota Kinabalu. A very nice, inexpensive large hotel (GBP12 pppn) on the airport side of the city very convenient to the centre and close to the road to Mt Kinabalu. Website:– www.holidaycity.com/berjaya-kota-kinabalu

Transport

Airline Transport

We flew with Malaysian Airlines, which offered the best deal at the time. The connection flight to Sandakan was really inexpensive and the flight from Lahad Datu back to KK was ridiculously cheap.

Hire Car

We drove ourselves from KK to RC then on to PHS. Two days later we drove to MtK and five days later we drove back to KK via RC. The car was very useful at MtK. We hired through a company named Extra, which offered a good deal.

Email:– admin@e-erac-online.com Website:– <http://www.e-erac-online.com/>

One week's hire approximated to GBP65 per person.

References

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Bransbury, J (1993) A Birdwatcher's Guide to Malaysia. Waymark Publishing

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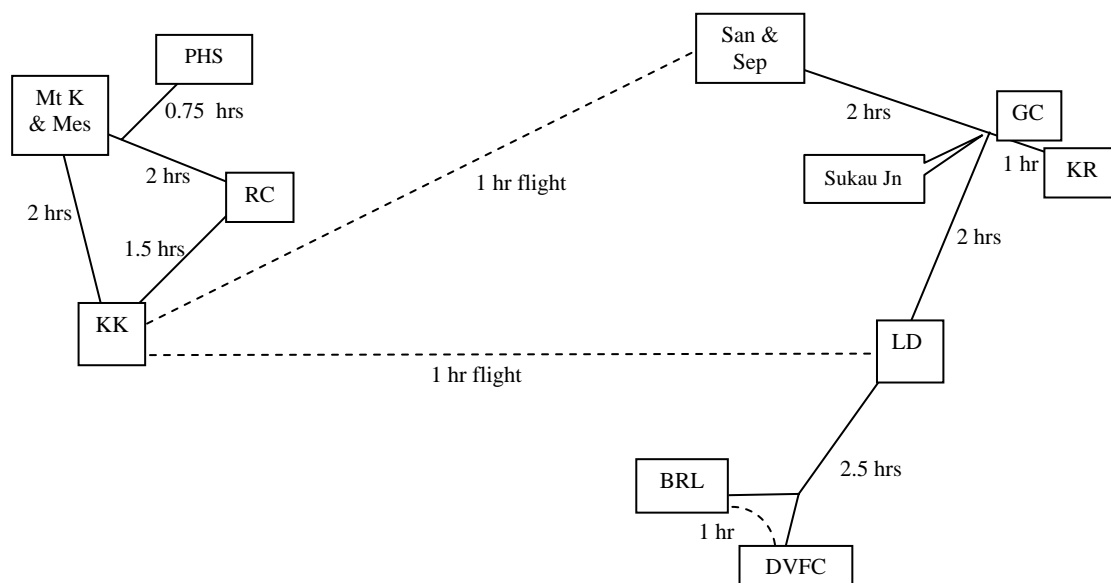
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Malaysian Regional Map – (2004–2005) Sabah and Kota Kinabalu. Periplus Editions – Tuttle Publishing

Plus trip reports by Eric Barnes, James Eaton (Birdtour Asia), Rob Hutchinson (Birdtour Asia), Chris Kehoe (Naturetrek), David Shackelford (Rockjumper), Rik Addison and Frank Rheindt to name but a few - plenty more on the web...

Locations Schematic

Driving times between sites given:



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