

Mammal-Watching

Borneo at Night

It was not so very long ago that the possibility of seeing many of the World's rarer, more elusive and most exquisite mammals was considered the realms of BBC cameraman and extremely patient researchers. However the past few years have seen a realisation that we can indeed find ways of seeing those incredibly shy and well-camouflaged cats or rare bovids of the forest interior.

Borneo possesses an extremely rich mammal fauna and a large percentage of it is found nowhere else on Earth. This is the primary aim of this tour, Borneo's endemic mammals, of which there are a goodly number, and in particular the smaller cats which thankfully still occur in the good numbers in some of the more remote parts of Borneo. In fact we believe we can find most of Borneo's 'higher' mammal fauna – perhaps only the Bay Cat remains out of reach at present. It is much easier to find Tarsiers, Civets, and the smaller Cats, at night, so on this tour you can expect a rather unusual sleep pattern with nightly excursions of various lengths spotlighting for these enigmatic creatures as well as a reasonable amount of daylight mammal (and general wildlife) watching as well, but rest assured we won't make it into too gruelling an exercise – there will be plenty of chance to both sleep and relax too.

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 – 3(am)

To Sabah, Sandakan and Sepilok

After overnight flights from Europe we'll arrive into Kuala Lumpur in the morning where we'll connect with our flight to Sandakan on the eastern seaboard of Sabah in Borneo. We'll arrive in the afternoon and transfer to world-famous Sepilok.

The next morning we'll have a chance to see at first hand the ongoing Orang-utan rehabilitation work that this centre has carried out for forty-five years, a tremendous achievement. Rescued and orphaned Orang-utans are brought in from logging sites, plantations and from the villages and are taught how to survive in the wild. You may later in the tour come across individuals that have been through the process are now thriving in the wild. Sepilok is situated in five thousand hectare forest reserve, much of it virgin rainforest, and so there's plenty of bird and butterfly life, however it will be the marvellous photo opportunities provided by these young Orang-utans that we'll concentrate on. Later in the day we'll drive to Sukau.

Days 3(pm) – 6(am)

Kinabatangan River: Sukau and Gomantong

We'll visit the Kinabatangan River where boat trips along narrow channels will give us give us a strong chance of close-up encounters with another feline, this

time the strange Flat-headed Cat, a species that enjoys the water as much as the trees. The floodplains here support a decent population of the slightly (!) dwarfed form of Elephant prevalent in Borneo. We'll see up-close Maroon Langurs, six species of Hornbill, the endangered Storm's Stork and Buffy Fish Owl and there will be fantastic opportunities to capture great Proboscis Monkey images. Pig-tailed Macaques and Silvered Langurs are also common and we'll hope to see the enigmatic Hose's Langur here.

Electric-powered boats quietly propel us along channels and well-laid out trails allow on-foot exploration. Many groups of Proboscis Monkeys feed and sleep within a short boat-ride of the lodge. The white breeches and the huge distended belly, necessary to digest their leafy meals, give a rather comical air to these large monkeys, only added to by the males' extraordinary noses. Beautiful Maroon Langurs, their burnished fur shining in the evening sun, both Pig-tailed and Crab-eating Macaques, and the now rare Hose's Langur, can all be seen here. We'll also be on the lookout for Hairy-nosed Otters. Birdlife along the river and around the lodge is rich and varied. Black-and-red Broadbills feed in the grounds and Oriental Pygmy Kingfishers in the nearby forest. Long-tailed Parakeets fly overhead, the tiny endemic White-fronted Falconet watches from high vantage points and shimmering Blue-eared Kingfishers hunt along the riverbank. The globally endangered Storm's Stork has one of its last strongholds here. Lesser and Grey-headed Fish Eagles soar over the river on the lookout for the next big catch while in the evenings we can see Buffy Fish Owls. Sukau is a fantastic place to see hornbills. The huge comical bills and the expressive eyebrows, coupled with their striking plumages make these sought after birds a 'must-see' and at Sukau there are plenty of them. Perhaps the most stunning is the magnificent Rhinoceros Hornbill, pairs of which often let the boats drift close to them.

Days 6(pm) – 8(am) **Imbak Canyon**

The Imbak Canyon is fast generating a reputation for rare mammal-sightings. We've a good chance of the special cats here and recently Banteng have been spotted on several occasions. The Bornean Slow Loris is commonly encountered here. The strange orange Malay Weasel is likely as are Common Palm Civet, Short-tailed mongoose and Imbak was the location for only the second ever video footage of the amazing porcupine-mimic Tufted Ground Squirrel, an extremely rare species that looks like a giant 'red squirrel' and which turns its tail into a porcupine when feeling threatened. Also here is the beautiful Horse-tailed Squirrel and ungulates such as Bornean Yellow Muntjac, Greater Mouse Deer and Lesser Mouse Deer. On the last trip a highlight as an Otter-Civet.

Days 8(pm) – 15(am) **Deramakot Forest Reserve**

We'll arrive early in the afternoon and settle into our accommodation and after dinner we'll make our first night excursion, familiarising ourselves with Deramakot's

night-time ever-presents such as Leopard Cat, Small-toothed Palm Civet and Thomas' Flying Squirrel.

On our first morning in Deramakot we'll wake to the evocative whooping cries of Bornean Gibbons, and later we may see them swinging across the trails, their extraordinarily long arms being put to good use. A strange odour may reveal the presence of that most unusual of primates, the diminutive Western Tarsier, which quite literally, stinks! Most likely we will see this animal on one of the nightwalks or night drives (mostly the latter) on offer. We'll go out every night, either in the evening, or pre-dawn, for trips of varying lengths to give ourselves the best chance of seeing some the rare mammals, particularly the cats, and on each trip we can expect to see a good range of mammals.

Deramakot has recently become known as the place in Borneo to see many of the island's most sought-after mammals. Most of Borneo's cats are at least partially adapted to live in trees but the Marbled Cat is perhaps the most arboreal of all of them. It is both rare and supremely elusive and until recently there wasn't a single locality known where sightings were regular. All that has recently changed with a spate of sightings in Deramakot. Of course it (probably) won't be easy, we'll likely have to put many hours into the quest, but a whole week at Deramakot certainly gives us a great chance. And there's so much more to see – not least the Marbled Cat's larger cousin, the Clouded Leopard, which has also been seen regularly here. On any given night trip at Deramakot we are likely to see a good range of species. Sightings of Binturong and Small-toothed Palm Civets are frequent. So too both Black Flying Squirrel and Thomas' Flying Squirrel. Banded Linsang has recently been placed in a family of its own and sighting of this beautiful mammal is sure to be a highlight as is the rare Otter Civet, a species again most likely to be seen here. Really rather common are Bearded Pig, Greater Mouse Deer, and the truly impressive Red Giant Flying Squirrel, the most frequently encountered of the big flying squirrels here. The Sunda Colugo, rather improperly but evocatively known as the Flying Lemur, is likely to be seen several times, however Sun Bear... some have seen it here! In daylight the mammal-fest will continue with a range of squirrel species including Ear-spot Squirrel, Plantain Squirrel, Prevost's Squirrel, Low's Squirrel and Least Pygmy Squirrel, elegant Yellow-throated Martens, and a range of primates including Proboscis Monkey, Long-tailed Macaque, Sunda Pig-tailed Macaque, Bornean Orangutan and Mueller's Bornean Gibbon. Careful searching of riverside vegetation at night should reveal Malay Civet and the Phillipine Slow Loris, and if it's raining we find the enigmatic Moon Rat coming out to play!

There's plenty of bird life too. Diard's and Red-naped are amongst four species of Trogon one can see along Deramakot's A true denizen of Borneo (and nowhere else!) is the bizarre Bornean Bristlehead, a strange scarlet and black member of the crow family with a disproportionately thick bill. The loud calls of the Great Argus Pheasants reveal the locations of their leks – these are truly magnificent birds. We'll come across the impressive Great Slaty Woodpecker and the perky little Grey and Buff Woodpecker, while leafbirds, malkohas, yuhinas and an assortment of babblers and bulbuls pass by in richly diverse feeding parties while

fragile 'paper handkerchief' butterflies, or Tree Nymphs, drift through the mid-canopy layer.

Magnificent black and green Raja Brooke's Birdwing, several other birdwings, the stunning green Banded Peacock, Black and White Helens and Great Orange-tips all frequent the exotic flowers. Bright blue flashes erupt from under our feet as Archdukes and various Amathusiid butterflies head for a quieter spot. The forest floor and understory is home to many weird and wonderful creatures. Praying Mantids of all shapes and hues, giant pill bugs and beautifully-marked leafbugs. Perhaps the most sought-after and brilliantly-coloured birds in all Borneo make this shadowy deep green world their home. There are seven species of dazzling pittas at Deramakot, the most frequently encountered being Borneo's stunning endemic Blue-headed Pitta, all metallic reds, blues and purples. Others in this stunning group of birds include Blue-banded Pitta, Bornean Banded Pitta, Hooded Pitta and Black-crowned Pitta. We'll come across the endemic Storm's Stork as well as White-fronted Falconets, Red-bearded Bee-eaters, Dusky and Green Broadbills, Banded and Rufous Collared Kingfishers, numerous Babblers such as the rare Abbot's babbler, and of course, hornbills. Notable among these will be the uncommon White-crowned Hornbill and the spectacular Helmeted hornbills.

Mammal species that we might see during our stay could include Moonrat, Long-tailed Porcupine, Western Tarsier, Large Flying Fox, Bornean Yellow Muntjac, Diadem Roundleaf Bat and possibly Small-clawed Otter.

Days 15(pm) - 16 to UK/Europe

An evening departure from Sandakan with a connection through Kuala Lumpur taking us back to Europe the next day.

Call 01298 83563 or visit www.greentours.co.uk for the latest trip report from our previous Mammal Watching tours to Borneo. If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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