



**BORNEO:
SABAH PREMIUM TOUR**

**27 SEPTEMBER – 8 OCTOBER 2022
07 – 18 SEPTEMBER 2023
13 – 24 JULY 2024**



***Whitehead's Trogon** – one of the famous “Whitehead's trio” of Borneo which we target on this trip (photo Liew Weng Keong)*

Borneo, the world's third-largest island, is one of the world's most biodiverse wildlife havens. With over 50 island endemics found across pristine dipterocarp forests, montane cloudforests, riverine habitats, and mangrove swamps you should enjoy an amazing time on this small-group birdwatching tour filled with stunning birds from mouthwatering families like pittas, trogons, kingfishers, hornbills, and broadbills, as well as a wide range of mammalian treasures.

Our Borneo birding tour will take us to the important birdwatching sites of the Malaysian province of Sabah, which covers the northernmost part of this vast and amazing island, including time spent birding in five of its IBAs (Important Bird Areas identified by BirdLife International): the Crocker Range, Mount Kinabalu, Kabili-Sepilok, the Kinabatangan river floodplain, and the Danum Valley (where we will stay at the magnificent Borneo Rainforest Lodge).

Some of the many birds we target include the famous "Whitehead's trio" of **Whitehead's Trogon**, **Whitehead's Broadbill**, and **Whitehead's Spiderhunter**, along with the monotypic **Bornean Bristlehead**, a big target for family listers and one of Borneo's most sought endemics. We will also look for other mega endemic birds such as **Bornean Ground Cuckoo**, **Fruithunter**, and **Bornean Green Magpie**, and we will look for four glittering endemic pittas, the simply sublime quartet of **Blue-headed Pitta**, **Black-crowned Pitta**, **Blue-banded Pitta**, and **Bornean Banded Pitta**. Furthermore, we will also look for the near-mythical **Giant Pitta**.

On our radar will be all eight hornbill species that occur here, including ones that are over a meter (three feet) long, such as the spectacular **Helmeted Hornbill**, which unfortunately is now Critically Endangered (IUCN), plus **Wrinkled Hornbill**, **Rhinoceros Hornbill**, and others. There will also be a plethora of other incredible endemic and Sundaic birds available during this tour, with a few examples to whet the appetite being **Storm's Stork**, **Great Argus**, **Oriental Bay Owl**, **Bornean Forktail**, **Bornean Whistler**, and **Bornean Blue Flycatcher**.



Bornean Bristlehead, a bizarre and monotypic endemic target (photo Liew Weng Keong)

In addition to the incredible birds we will also be focused on finding some spectacular mammals, such as the “old man of the forest”, the **Bornean Orangutan**, along with the unique-looking **Proboscis Monkey**, plus other delights including **Nicobar Crab-eating** and **Southern Pig-tailed Macaques**, **Malay Civet**, **Red Giant Flying Squirrel** as a small sample of possibilities.

This Sabah bird tour can be combined with our **Birding Tour Borneo: Sarawak – Restricted Range Endemics**, the perfect extension to Sabah, during which we will look for the endemic trio of **Dulit Frogmouth**, **Bornean Frogmouth**, and **Black Oriole**, which are not possible in Sabah. Following that there is our **Birding Tour Malaysia: Peninsular Malaysia**, which focuses on the birds available on the peninsula that are unlikely, or not possible at all in Malaysian Borneo (e.g. **Malayan Banded Pitta**, **Garnet Pitta**, and **Mountain Peacock-Pheasant**).



*We will be sure to look for the incredible **Bornean Orangutan** during our tour of Sabah.*

Itinerary (12 days/11 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Kota Kinabalu

Your flight arrives any time in the morning, and you will be transferred to your hotel with the rest of the morning at leisure. We will meet for a welcome lunch at the hotel lobby at 1 p.m. and thereafter will make a start with our first birding of the tour. We will likely head to the nearby Tanjung Aru beach to look for **Blue-naped Parrot**, **Pied Triller**, and other birds that we may not encounter for the rest of the trip.

Overnight: Dreamtel, Kota Kinabalu

Day 2. Tambunan Rafflesia Nature Reserve Center, transfer to Kinabalu National Park

Early morning (usually around 5 a.m.) we will take a packed breakfast and transfer to Kinabalu National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. En route we will stop at the Tambunan Rafflesia Nature Reserve Center and Gunung Alab in the Crocker Range. Here we will be birding for the whole morning, hoping to see, among others, a number of Bornean endemics such as **Whitehead's Spiderhunter**, **Bornean Barbet**, **Mountain Barbet**, **Golden-naped Barbet**, **Bornean Treepie**, **Chestnut-crested Yuhina**, **Bare-headed Laughingthrush**, and **Bornean Bulbul**, as well as **Ochraceous Bulbul**, **Cinereous Bulbul**, and **Flavescent Bulbuls** (of a distinct Bornean-endemic subspecies also known as Pale-faced Bulbul and a potential future split), **Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush**, and **Blyth's Shrike-babbler**.

From here we will make our way into the mountains to Kinabalu National Park. We will be based for three nights in Kundasang, a small village very close to the entrance to the park.

Overnight: Kinabalu Pine Resort, Kundasang



*The striking **Bornean Green Magpie** can be seen in Kinabalu National Park (photo Liew Weng Keong).*

Day 3. Birding Kinabalu National Park

Today we will explore the network of forested trails around the headquarters of Kinabalu National Park on the forest-draped slopes of Mount (Gunung) Kinabalu. This mountain is the highest peak between the Himalayas and the tall ranges of New Guinea at 4,090 meters (13,418 feet). Its huge granite massif holds a spectacular avifauna with plenty of endemics for us to enjoy. Among these we hope to find **Whitehead's Trogon**, **Whitehead's Broadbill**, **Fruithunter**, **Golden-naped Barbet**, **Crimson-headed Partridge**, **Red-breasted Partridge**,

Bornean Swiftlet, Bornean Treepie, Bornean Stubtail, Bornean Green Magpie, Bornean Forktail, Eyebrowed Jungle Flycatcher, Black-sided Flowerpecker, Bare-headed Laughingthrush, Mountain Wren-Babbler, Bornean Whistler, Chestnut-crested Yuhina, and Everett's Thrush.



*The large and bulky **Whitehead's Broadbill** will hopefully be found in the montane forests on Mount (Gunung) Kinabalu (photo Liew Weng Keong).*

In addition to the species mentioned above we will also be on the lookout for other enticing species, some perhaps even found in mixed feeding flocks (which can be a spectacular sight), like **Ochraceous Bulbul, Cinereous Bulbul, Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush, Sunda Laughingthrush, Blyth's Shrike-babbler, Mountain Leaf Warbler, Yellow-breasted Warbler, Sunda Bush Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Temminck's Sunbird, and Black-and-crimson Oriole**, to name just a few.

Overnight: Kinabalu Pine Resort, Kundasang

Day 4. Birding Kinabalu National Park

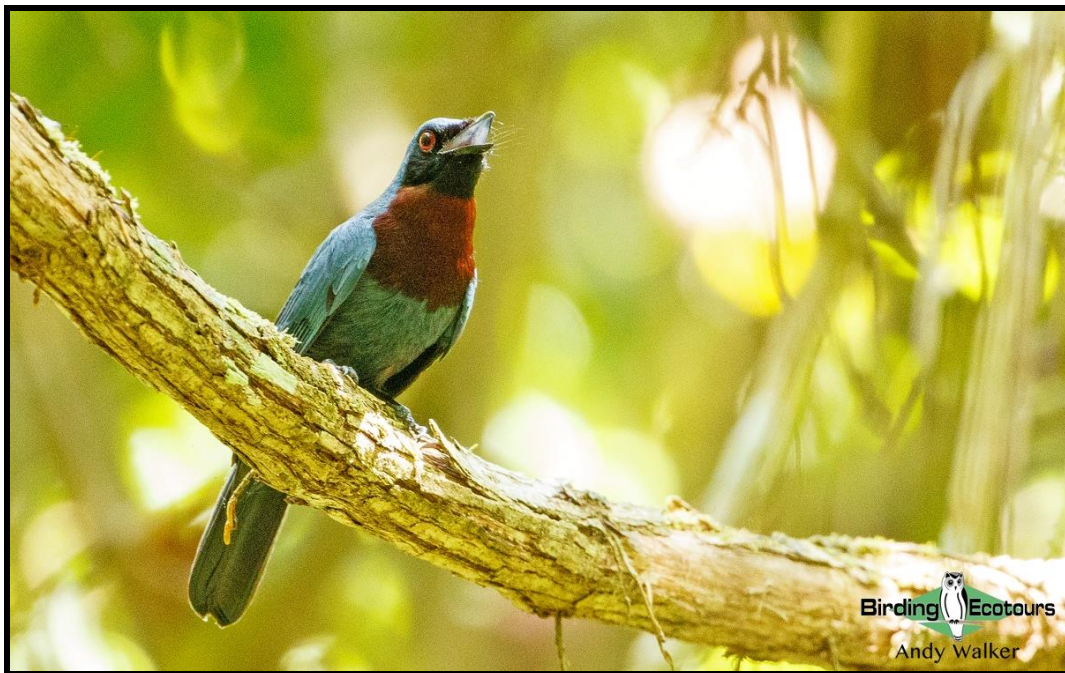
We will have another day birding within and around the Kinabalu National Park with morning and afternoon birding sessions likely to be punctuated by a period around our accommodation over the middle of the day. We will look for the birds mentioned above and will maybe focus on some of the more difficult species, or those requiring better views, such as the endemic **Bornean**

Forktail, the endemic subspecies of **Flavescent Bulbul**, and the more widespread **White-browed Shortwing**, though the subspecies occurring here is also a potential split as Bornean Shortwing, so it is worth looking for. We will also again be on the lookout for **Mountain Black-eye**, **Pygmy White-eye**, **Fruithunter**, **Cinereous Bulbul**, **Bornean Treepie**, **Bornean Stubtail**, **Bornean Whistler**, **Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush**, **Whitehead's Trogon**, **Whitehead's Broadbill**, and **Mountain Wren-Babbler**.

Overnight: Kinabalu Pine Resort, Kundasang

Day 5. Poring Hot Springs, transfer to Sepilok

Although in the afternoon today we will have a lengthy (but extremely worthwhile) drive, we will spend a good part of the morning birding at Poring Hot Springs, a small reserve approximately 40 kilometers (25 miles) from Kinabalu National Park. Poring is mainly known for its hot springs, which are a major Bornean tourist attraction, but the reserve also holds numerous exciting birds. During our walk we hope to encounter **Rufous-collared Kingfisher**, **Blue-banded Pitta**, **Chestnut-capped Thrush**, **Moustached Babbler**, **Diard's Trogon**, **Black Hornbill**, **Red-throated Barbet**, **Little Spiderhunter**, **Bornean Blue Flycatcher**, **Maroon-breasted Philentoma**, and perhaps also the attractive **Scaly-breasted Bulbul**. If we are lucky enough to find a fruiting tree there is a slim chance of the tough **Hose's Broadbill**, but chances for this species are greater on our Sarawak extension.



*The gorgeous **Maroon-breasted Philentoma** is an interesting, often secretive bird.*

During the afternoon we will drive approximately five to six hours overland, mainly through endless oil palm plantations, to Sepilok and check into our accommodation for the next couple of

nights. It is a depressing sight in all honesty; however, we are encouraged that there are still some large areas of protected habitat allowing the incredible lowland species here to continue to exist, and we hope that the presence of birdwatchers in the country can spark an interest in the local population to continue with the conservation efforts underway.

In the evening there will be a night walk in search of birds, mammals, and other nocturnal creatures.

Overnight: Sepilok Jungle Resort

Day 6. Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve and its Rainforest Discovery Centre

We will have a full day to explore this exciting area. We will bird the wonderful dipterocarp forest of the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve with its magnificent walkway at the Rainforest Discovery Centre in the morning, when the birds are most active. This will give us a chance for **Bornean Bristlehead**, our main target among many other species we are going to encounter here like **Black-crowned Pitta**, **Red-naped Trogon**, **Scarlet-rumped Trogon**, **Black-capped Babbler**, **Red-bearded Bee-eater**, **Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher**, **Rufous-collared Kingfisher**, **Bornean Spiderhunter**, and possibly even **Little Spiderhunter**, **Thick-billed Spiderhunter**, **Spectacled Spiderhunter**, **Yellow-eared Spiderhunter**, and **Long-billed Spiderhunter**, the endemic **Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker**, and **Dusky Munia**, as well as barbets, mid-canopy bulbuls, ground-dwelling babblers, cuckoos, minivets, and many more avian riches that can be found in these wonderfully birdy forests. This is a very special place, and it is sure to be a memorable morning.



*The stunning **Black-crowned Pitta** is possible in the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve area, and a sighting like this would be a tour highlight for sure (photo Liew Weng Keong).*

While birding here we might also see a number of inquisitive squirrels and possibly some primate species, among which the endearing **Maroon Leaf Monkey** might be particularly appreciated.

An optional visit to the famous Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre for either the morning or the afternoon feeding of these semi-wild primates, along with several other species that take advantage of the free handouts, can be arranged, although it is very likely, but of course not guaranteed, that we will see **Bornean Orangutan** in the wild during the second half of this tour.

Overnight: Sepilok Jungle Resort

Day 7. Birding Sepilok, transfer to the Kinabatangan River via Gomantong Caves

After breakfast we will still have time to do some morning birding in the Sepilok for any species we might have missed or of which we would like to try to get improved views.

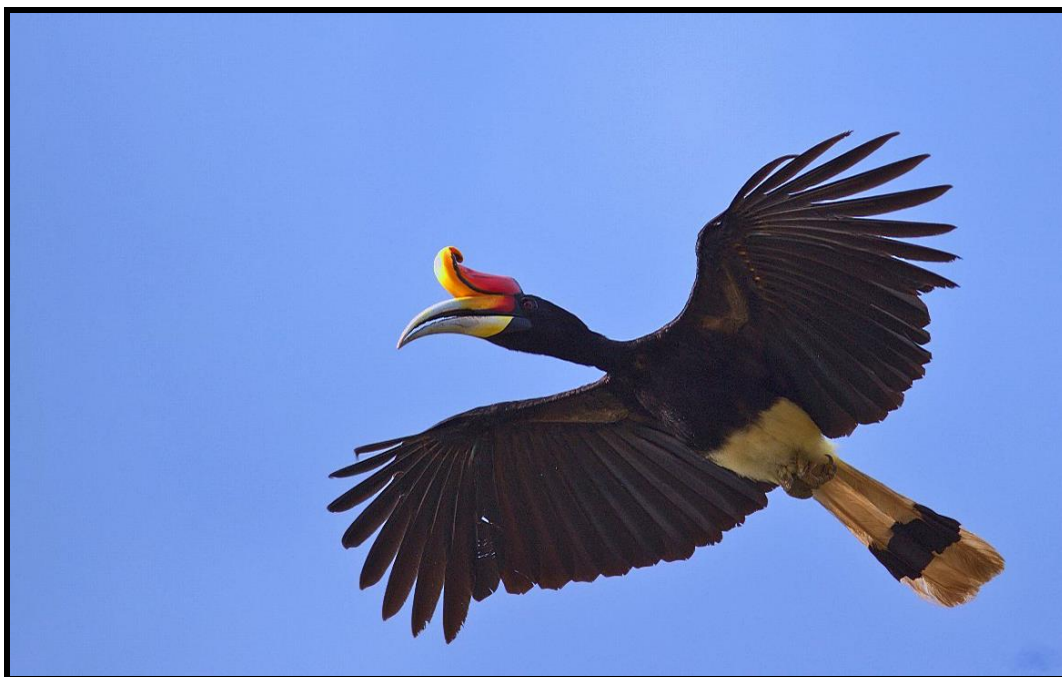
We will then drive two hours overland, transferring to Sukau on the Kinabatangan River. We will make a stop at the famous Gomantong Caves, an intricate cave system inside Gomantong Hill, the largest limestone outcrop in the Lower Kinabatangan area. The caves and the surrounding area are a protected area for wildlife, especially **Bornean Orangutan**, which is frequently seen at the entrance to the caves, and are well-known in birding circles for the variety of swiftlets inhabiting them, together with a vast array of other wildlife, including massive populations of cockroaches and bats. Here we have a chance to see four species of swiftlets, three of which are near-identical and really only safely told apart by their nests. **Edible-nest Swiftlet**, **Black-nest Swiftlet**, **Mossy-nest Swiftlet**, and the more distinct **Plume-toed Swiftlet** (following the splitting of the Glossy Swiftlet complex across southeast Asia) all nest in these caves. There is a boardwalk through the caves that will give us access to the inside of the cave system, where we will be able to see where these birds make their nests and how the local workers collect them for birds-nest soup on intricate rope-and-ladder systems.

After arrival and check-in at the lovely Borneo Nature Lodge on the Kinabatangan River, where we will stay for two nights, we will embark in the late afternoon on our first birding river cruise.

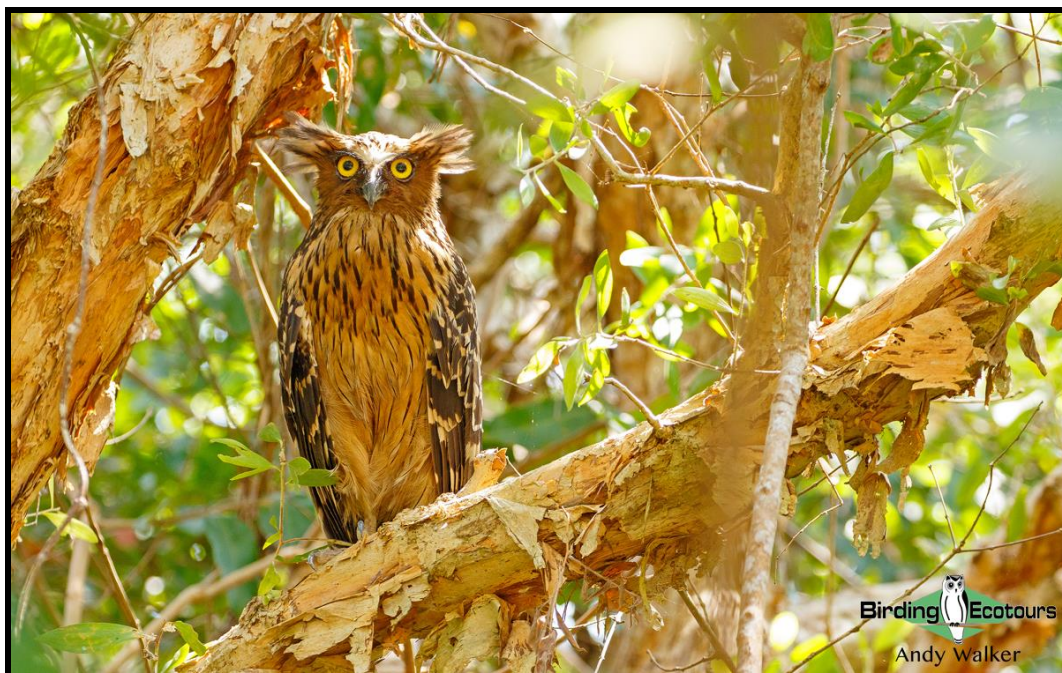
The Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary is now within the purview of the Sabah Wildlife Department. Despite ever-encroaching oil palm plantations the original lowland forests and mangrove swamps near the coast have largely survived, providing sanctuary for a population of **Saltwater Crocodiles** and containing some of Borneo's highest concentrations of wildlife. Of special note are Borneo's indigenous **Proboscis Monkey**, **Bornean Orangutan**, **Asian Elephant** (the subspecies occurring here possibly a full species: Bornean Pygmy Elephant), and the endemic **Borneo River Shark**. We will be looking for as many of these unique animals during our time on the river, and this sanctuary is also well known for its prolific birdlife.

Some of our main avian targets on the Kinabatangan River are the endemic Bornean subspecies of **Black Magpie**, a slate of glittering kingfishers including **Collared Kingfisher**, **Rufous-collared Kingfisher**, **Ruddy Kingfisher**, **Stork-billed Kingfisher**, **Banded Kingfisher**, **Blue-eared Kingfisher**, and **Blue-banded Kingfisher**, plus **Red-naped Trogon**, **Scarlet-rumped Trogon**, and **Hooded Pitta**. If we are very lucky we will also find a huge target bird, the enigmatic, rare, and just plain tough endemic **Bornean Ground Cuckoo**.

Overnight: Borneo Nature Lodge, Sukau



Rhinoceros Hornbill is an incredible sight (photo Liew Weng Keong).



We hope to find Buffy Fish Owl roosting around our lodge grounds or vicinity.

Day 8. Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary

In the early morning and mid-afternoon boat trips will take us along the river and its small tributaries. Here we hope to see wild **Bornean Orangutan** feasting on the fruits of riverside fig

trees or, in the late afternoon, preparing their nighttime nests. Troops of the bizarre **Proboscis Monkeys** with their huge potbellies and the males' extraordinary, floppy noses will watch us curiously. Many groups of **Nicobar Crab-eating Macaques** will be our constant companions, and we might find the occasional **Silvery Lutung** (langur) and, with luck, perhaps **Bornean Gibbon**. We might come across a herd of **Asian Elephants** (Bornean Pygmy Elephant) in this area or the secretive and rare **Flat-headed Cat**.

The forest along the river and its tributaries is home to a wealth of birds, including such spectacular species as **Rhinoceros Hornbill**, **Helmeted Hornbill**, **Black Hornbill**, **Oriental Pied Hornbill**, **Bushy-crested Hornbill**, **Wreathed Hornbill**, **White-crowned Hornbill**, and **Wrinkled Hornbill** (that is all the hornbills that occur in Borneo!), **White-bellied Sea Eagle**, **Lesser Fish Eagle**, **Grey-headed Fish Eagle**, **Wallace's Hawk-Eagle**, **Lesser Adjutant**, **Black-and-red Broadbill**, **Black-and-yellow Broadbill**, **Hooded Pitta**, and with luck a pair or two of the Endangered (IUCN) **Storm's Storks** or the endemic **White-fronted Falconet** sitting on a snag.

Watching smaller birds from the boat is not really easy, but the lodge grounds are very birdy, and the lodge has an extensive boardwalk system and an observation tower for bird watching. Between boat trips we will explore these areas, hoping to find the delightful **Black-crowned Pitta**, **Asian Red-eyed Bulbul**, **Violet Cuckoo**, the endemic **White-crowned Shama**, **Chestnut-winged Babbler**, **Blue-throated Bee-eater**, **Dark-necked Tailorbird**, **Maroon-breasted Philentoma**, and **Orange-bellied Flowerpecker**. In the evening we might see **Brown Wood Owl** or **Buffy Fish Owl** at the jetty.

Overnight: Borneo Nature Lodge, Sukau



*The huge **Helmeted Hornbill** is a spectacular and now rare sight across its whole small global range due to illegal hunting (photo Liew Weng Keong).*

Day 9. Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary to Danum Valley via Lahad Datu

After a morning cruise to look for more birds we will depart overland to Danum Valley and make a stop at Lahad Datu for lunch after a journey of a couple of hours. After lunch we will have another drive for a few more hours on an adventurous prior logging road to the Danum Valley Conservation Area and the Borneo Rainforest Lodge. This wonderful, upscale lodge is situated in a large tract of mind-blowing primary rainforest, one of only very few remaining on Borneo after rampant logging and clearing for oil palm plantations. While within much of the conservation area selective logging was allowed, a large part had been set aside for the protection of one of only two remaining expanses of primary lowland dipterocarp forest in Sabah.

The Danum Valley Conservation Area boasts 268 bird species, and 110 mammals, 72 reptiles, 56 amphibians, and 37 fish species have been recorded here so far. We will search for a good selection of especially the birds and mammals during our time in this great habitat. We plan to arrive at the lodge by the middle of the afternoon and begin birding before it gets dark, making a start on the species listed below for days 10 and 11.

After dinner we may be able to join one of the night drives to look for nocturnal animal as well as night birds, and we will likely make a couple of night outings during our time in the Danum Valley. Results of these are always unpredictable, of course, but with luck we might find **Large Frogmouth** and **Gould's Frogmouth** or something really exciting from the mammalian world, like **Red Giant** or **Thomas's Flying Squirrels**, **Colugo**, the occasional **Bornean Slow Loris** or **Horsfield's Tarsier**, the tiny **Temminck's Flying Squirrel**, or the giant tree-dwelling **Malaysian Tarantula** (clearly not a mammal!).

Overnight: Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley



*We will hope to find **Gould's Frogmouth** while in Danum Valley.*

Days 10 – 11. Danum Valley Conservation Area

During our two full days in Danum Valley we will explore the excellent system of trails around the lodge as well as the canopy walkway, and after dinner there will be opportunities to go out with one of the local guides in search of nocturnal wildlife.

Among the multitude of birds we hope to encounter here are eight species of hornbills, with the huge **Rhinoceros Hornbill** likely to be seen and heard almost daily, plus chances of **Helmeted Hornbill** and **White-crested Hornbill** to name a couple of others. We will also be looking for many other specialties, like **Great Argus**, **Crested Partridge**, **Crested Fireback** (an endemic subspecies very different to that occurring in peninsular Malaysia and another potential future split), and **Chestnut-necklaced Partridge** among others.



Great Argus is huge, 200 centimeters (c.79 inches) in length, but very secretive – what a totally spectacular bird (photo Liew Weng Keong)!

The entire slate of Bornean pittas occurs in Danum Valley, including the four endemics **Black-crowned Pitta** and **Blue-headed Pitta** along with the other two more-difficult endemic pittas – **Bornean Banded Pitta** and **Blue-banded Pitta**, and we will also hope for the near-mythical **Giant Pitta**, while **Hooded Pitta** should prove less elusive.

In addition to the suite of hornbills, pittas, and pheasants (and related species) mentioned above we will look for the monotypic **Bornean Bristlehead** and of course other special target birds like **Bornean Blue Flycatcher**, **White-crowned Shama**, **Black-throated Wren-Babbler**, **Bornean Wren-Babbler**, **Crested Jay**, **Sunda Blue Flycatcher**, **Chestnut-naped Forktail**, **White-crowned Forktail**, **Great-billed Heron**, **Wallace's Hawk-Eagle**, **Blyth's Hawk-Eagle**, **Rufous-bellied Eagle**, **Bat Hawk**, **Large Green Pigeon**, **Great Slaty Woodpecker**, **Olive-backed Woodpecker**, **Ashy Tailorbird**, **Whiskered Treeswift**, **Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher**,

Chestnut-capped Thrush, and a host of forest bulbuls (including the Critically Endangered (IUCN) **Straw-headed Bulbul**), babblers, flowerpeckers, flycatchers, woodpeckers, drongos, raptors, sunbirds, and spiderhunters. This place really is a naturalist's dream.



Blue-headed Pitta is a target during our time in Danum Valley (photo Liew Weng Keong).

Danum Valley is a particularly good area for **Bornean Orangutan**, which is sometimes even seen within the lodge grounds! Commoner mammal species include **Nicobar Crab-eating** and **Southern Pig-tailed Macaques**, a wide variety of both diurnal and nocturnal tree shrews and squirrels, **Bearded Pig**, **Masked Palm** and **Malay Civets**, both **Greater** and **Lesser Oriental Chevrotains**, the endemic **Bornean Yellow Muntjac**, the much-more-widespread **Southern Red Muntjac**, and **Sambar**. The biggest predator here is the **Sunda Clouded Leopard**, which is seen on night drives a couple of times a year – so one can always hope.

The heat of the afternoon after lunch allows some relaxed meanderings around the resort, and you can find flowerpeckers and spiderhunters in the flowering bushes, along with some stunning butterflies, all of which might provide some nice photographic opportunities. Regardless of what we see here we will be in for a veritable treat. It is a real privilege to wander through the forest here and imagine what this fascinating island would have been like in years gone by. We could well encounter a trip highlight bird or mammal during our time in Danum Valley.

Overnight: Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley

Day 12. Danum Valley to Lahad Datu, departure

Sadly, our exciting tour to wild Sabah will end today. We will transfer from Danum Valley back to the Lahad Datu airport, where the tour ends at lunchtime. From here you can catch an

afternoon flight to Kota Kinabalu to continue with our **Birding Tour Borneo: Sarawak – Restricted Range Endemics** and maybe even follow that up with our **Birding Tour Malaysia: Peninsular Malaysia**, which would give you a very thorough Malaysian birding experience and surely one never to be forgotten. However, if that is not for you this time you can connect with your flights out of Kota Kinabalu and head for home late in the evening or add an extra night or two in the city.

Overnight: Not included



*The endemic **White-fronted Falconet** is a tiny and prolific hunter – beware if you are a bulbul or smaller (photo Liew Weng Keong)!*

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides, and other factors.

Duration: 12 days
Group Size: 6 - 8
Dates: 27 September - 08 October 2022
07 - 18 September 2023
13 - 24 July 2024
Start: Kota Kinabalu
End: Lahad Datu
Prices: MYR31,259 per person sharing – based on 6 – 8 participants (2022)
MYR34,385 per person sharing – based on 6 – 8 participants (2023)
MYR37,825 per person sharing – based on 6 – 8 participants (2024)
Single Supplements: MYR6,120 (2022)
MYR6,732 (2023)
MYR7,405 (2024)

Price includes:

Accommodation (as described above)
All meals (from lunch on day 1 to breakfast on day 12)
Drinking water, please bring a refillable water bottle
Expert tour leader
Local bird and wildlife guide fees
All ground transport and tolls while on tour, including airport pick-up and drop off
National park/birdwatching reserve entrance fees (except the optional visit to the Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre on day 6)
Gratuities (at restaurants only, any other gratuity not included)
Excursions and activities as detailed in the itinerary

Price excludes:

Flights (into Kota Kinabalu at the beginning of the tour, out of Lahad Datu at the end of the tour, note we can book the flight for you from Lahad Datu back to Kota Kinabalu)
Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre (optional visit on day 6)
Airport taxes
Visa if required
Soft/alcoholic drinks
Gratuities (except at restaurants, where they are included)
Camera and video fees
Personal travel insurance
Items of a personal nature, e.g. gifts, laundry, internet access, phone calls, etc.
Gratuities (except at restaurants, where they are included)