

Birding Ecotours



MALAYSIA: BORNEO, SABAH – TRUSMADI HIGHLANDS, BULWER'S PHEASANT, AND MORE TOUR TRIP REPORT

27 – 29 SEPTEMBER 2022

By Chris Lotz



Bornean Banded Pitta on a log just outside the Bulwer's Pheasant blind (hide).

Overview

What a trip this proved to be! It met all the expectations of our short [Bulwer's Pheasant blog here](#). Mount Trusmadi is Malaysia's second highest peak (after Mount Kinabalu) at about 8,000 feet (2,642 meters) and on this birding tour we focused our efforts on the forested Trusmadi highlands, with the peak visible in the distance.

The trip was really successful, not only did we obtain multiple close-up views of three **Bulwer's Pheasants** (a pair and a single male), one of the most enigmatic birds in Asia, but we also saw close-up **Crested Partridges** (Roul-rouls) and **Great Argus** too, along with splendid views of **Bornean Banded Pitta** and the more elusive, **Blue-banded Pitta**. There were plenty of other star Bornean endemic birds seen too, like **White-crowned Shama**, **Dayak Blue Flycatcher**, and **Bornean Leafbird**. Mammals were also good, with several species seen in a very short time. We plan to add this trip to our set departure tour repertoire so [watch this space](#) for details. We may also include Bornean Peacock-Pheasant which is currently (2022) showing quite reliably in a different part of Sabah. Combine this with our [Sarawak restricted range bird species tour](#) and our [classic Sabah birding tour](#) and you'll be able to see the bulk of Malaysian Borneo's star birds.



White-crowned Shama was one of several Bornean endemic birds seen on this short tour.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 27th September 2022. Kota Kinabalu to Trusmadi highlands

We departed from Kota Kinabalu at 6 am, stopping for an excellent breakfast midway between there and our accommodation near Mount Trusmadi. By late morning we had already checked in and were able to enjoy a tasty lunch before trying for the elusive **Blue-banded Pitta**, which we did get extremely close to (judging from its call), but without visuals (for now...). We then drove to the pheasant blind (hide) and were richly rewarded with our main target, **Bulwer's Pheasant**

(three of them, a pair and a single male) along with a female **Great Argus** that also showed well. What an amazing start to this short tour, one of Asia's most highly anticipated species was in the bag already! **White-crowned Shama** also put in an appearance, as did numerous entertaining, very active, **Low's Squirrels**. A short walk near the hide after a fantastic three hours in it, to try and see a calling **Sunda Cuckoo** (sadly without success on visuals), did generate **Slender Squirrel**.

In the evening, we saw a **Malay Civet** around the lodgings, along with a huge **Long-horned Beetle**. We then walked the short distance to the legendary moth traps and saw not only a host of incredible moths and other insects, but also a magnificent **Barred Eagle-Owl** nearby.



One of the moth traps, loaded with interesting insects.

Day 2, 28th September 2022. Full day birding in the Trusmadi highlands

Today was an epic day. We started at the blind again and saw the **Bulwer's Pheasant** pair nicely. **Great Argus** was less co-operative, and we only heard a couple of them close-by, failing to lay eyes on them. A beautiful **Black-and-red Broadbill** showed briefly, while **Temminck's Babbler** and **Dayak Blue Flycatcher** gave more prolonged views. A close-up **Yellow-throated Marten** was a true highlight and a **Southern Red Muntjac** showed itself a couple of times. After breakfast in the blind, we tried for **Blue-banded Pitta** again, but we only heard it (as is commonly the case; one should never underestimate the elusiveness of this species).

After lunch, we headed for a different blind which was also extremely productive. At least a dozen **Crested Partridges** arrived and gave us excellent views - both males and female birds. A close-up **Bornean Banded Pitta** gave ridiculously close views as it sat on top of a log just outside the blind (see trip report cover image). What a beauty! Mammals were (as usual for Borneo) great at this hide, and included a **Mountain Treeshrew**, **Horse-tailed Squirrel**, and **Slender Squirrel**.

Roadside birding between sessions at the blind always proved good, and we encountered the attractive **Crimson-winged Woodpecker**, **Asian Brown Flycatcher**, **Scaly-breasted Bulbul**, **Streaked Bulbul**, various other more common bulbul species, **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch**, **Bornean Leafbird**, **Grey-rumped Treeswift** (awesome to see through the scope sitting in a dead tree), dazzling **Temminck's Sunbird** and the drabber **Purple-naped Sunbird**, **Black-sided Flowerpecker**, **Little Spiderhunter**, **Orange-bellied Flowerpecker**, and **Plain Flowerpecker**.



Great birding habitat with Mount Trusmadi peaks in the distance.

Day 3, 29th September 2022. Trusmadi highlands to Kota Kinabalu

We spent an early morning session in the hide again where the pair of **Bulwer's Pheasants** showed magnificently again, but the male **Great Argus** still did not show despite calling nearby and a brief appearance by the female. We then went to look for **Blue-banded Pitta** and were richly rewarded with great views high in a tree after some patient waiting. We also enjoyed some roadside birding, which gave great views of **Little Cuckoo-Dove** and some poorer views of **Bushy-crested Hornbill** and **White-crowned Hornbill**. We then transferred back to Kota Kinabalu, getting great views of **White-fronted** (Bornean) **Falconet** en route. We saw the falconet catch a large insect and consume it.

All in all, this was a superb trip, with pleasant temperatures in the highlands, a nice place to stay for two nights, and star birds and other wildlife, not to mention great company.

Bird List - Following IOC (12.1)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen. The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: VU = Vulnerable. The common name for Bornean endemics is shown in **bold** type, e.g., **Bulwer's Pheasant**.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Pheasants & Allies (Phasianidae)	
Red-breasted Partridge (H)	<i>Arborophila hyperythra</i>
Crested Partridge	<i>Rollulus rouloul</i>
Bulwer's Pheasant – VU	<i>Lophura bulweri</i>
Great Argus	<i>Argusianus argus</i>
Hérons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)	
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>
Rails, Crakes & Coots (Rallidae)	
White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopacidae)	
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>
Little Cuckoo-Dove	<i>Macropygia ruficeps</i>
Zebra Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>
Cuckoos (Cuculidae)	

Common Name	Scientific Name
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
Sunda Cuckoo (H)	<i>Cuculus lepidus</i>
Owls (Strigidae)	
Barred Eagle-Owl	<i>Bubo sumatranus</i>
Treeswifts (Hemiprocnidae)	
Grey-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Plume-toed Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia affinis</i>
Bee-eaters (Meropidae)	
Red-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctornis amictus</i>
Hornbills (Bucerotidae)	
White-crowned Hornbill	<i>Berenicornis comatus</i>
Bushy-crested Hornbill	<i>Anorrhinus galeritus</i>
Woodpeckers (Picidae)	
Crimson-winged Woodpecker	<i>Picus puniceus</i>
Caracaras, Falcons (Falconidae)	
White-fronted Falconet	<i>Microhierax latifrons</i>
Pittas (Pittidae)	
Bornean Banded Pitta	<i>Hydrornis schwaneri</i>
Blue-banded Pitta	<i>Erythropitta arquata</i>
Cuckooshrikes (Campephagidae)	
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus</i>
Drongos (Dicuridae)	
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
Crows, Jays (Corvidae)	
Bornean Treepie (H)	<i>Dendrocitta cinerascens</i>
Rail-babbler (Eupetidae)	
Rail-babbler (H)	<i>Eupetes macrocerus</i>
Bulbuls (Pycnonotidae)	

Common Name	Scientific Name
Scaly-breasted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus squamatus</i>
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>
Charlotte's Bulbul	<i>Iole charlottae</i>
Streaked Bulbul	<i>Ixos malaccensis</i>
Cinereous Bulbul	<i>Hemixos cinereus</i>
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>
Cisticolas & Allies (Cisticolidae)	
Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>
Ashy Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>
Babblers (Timaliidae)	
Bold-striped Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronus bornensis</i>
Fulvettas, Ground Babblers (Pellorneidae)	
Temminck's Babbler	<i>Pellorneum pyrrogenys</i>
White-eyes (Zosteropidae)	
Pygmy White-eye	<i>Oculocincta squamifrons</i>
Nuthatches (Sittidae)	
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta frontalis</i>
Chats, Old World Flycatchers (Muscicapidae)	
White-crowned Shama	<i>Copsychus stricklandii</i>
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
Dayak Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis montanus</i>
Indigo Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias indigo</i>
Leafbirds (Chloropseidae)	
Bornean Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis kinabaluensis</i>
Flowerpeckers (Dicaeidae)	
Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus xanthopygius</i>
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>
Black-sided Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum monticulum</i>
Sunbirds (Nectariniidae)	

Common Name	Scientific Name
Plain Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes simplex</i>
Temminck's Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga temminckii</i>
Purple-naped Sunbird	<i>Hypogramma hypogrammicum</i>
Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>

Total seen	50
Total heard only	4
Total recorded	54

Mammal List

Common Name	Scientific Name
Squirrels (Sciuridae)	
Horse-tailed Squirrel	<i>Sundasciurus hippurus</i>
Low's Squirrel	<i>Sundasciurus lowii</i>
Slender Squirrel	<i>Sundasciurus tenuis</i>
Treeshrews (Tupaiaidae)	
Mountain Treeshrew	<i>Tupia montana</i>
Old World Monkeys (Cercopithecidae)	
Southern Pig-tailed Macaque	<i>Macaca nemestrina</i>
Civets, Genets, & Oyans (Viverridae)	
Malay (Palm) Civet	<i>Viverra zibetha</i>
Mustelids (Mustelidae)	
Yellow-throated Marten	<i>Martes flavigula</i>
Deer (Cervidae)	
Southern Red Muntjac	<i>Muntiacus muntjak</i>
Total	8

