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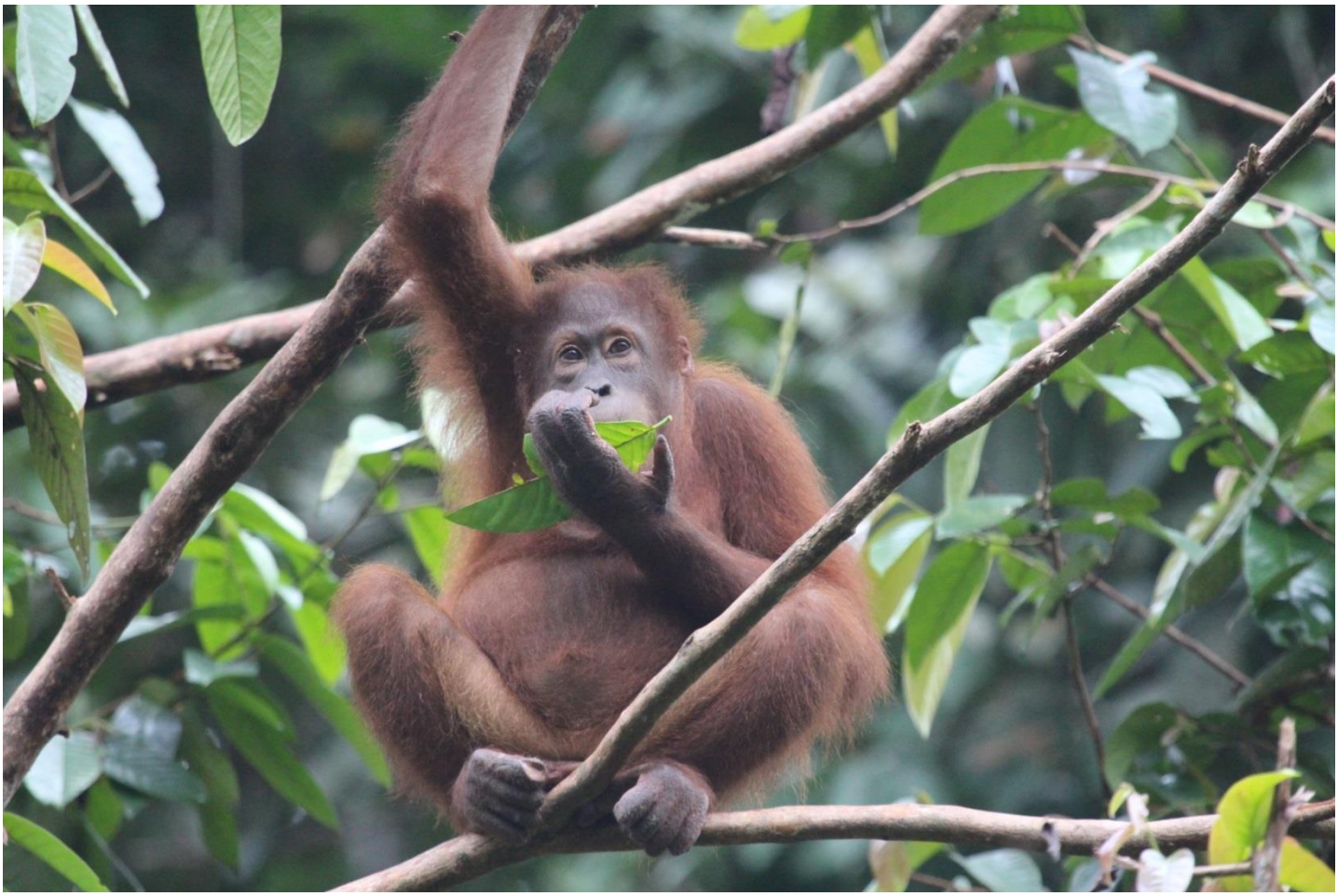


SABAH, MALAYSIA

Date - July 2014

Duration - 32 Days

Destinations
Kuala Lumpur - Kota Kinabalu - Kinabalu Park - Sandakan - Turtle Islands Park - Selingan Island - Labuk Bay - Sepilok - Sepilok Forest Reserve - Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre - Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre - Rainforest Discovery Centre - Kinabatangan River - Sukau - Gomantong Caves - Lahad Datu - Tabin Wildlife Reserve - Danum Valley Conservation Area - Borneo Rainforest Lodge - Danum Valley Field Centre - Deramakot Forest Reserve

Trip Overview

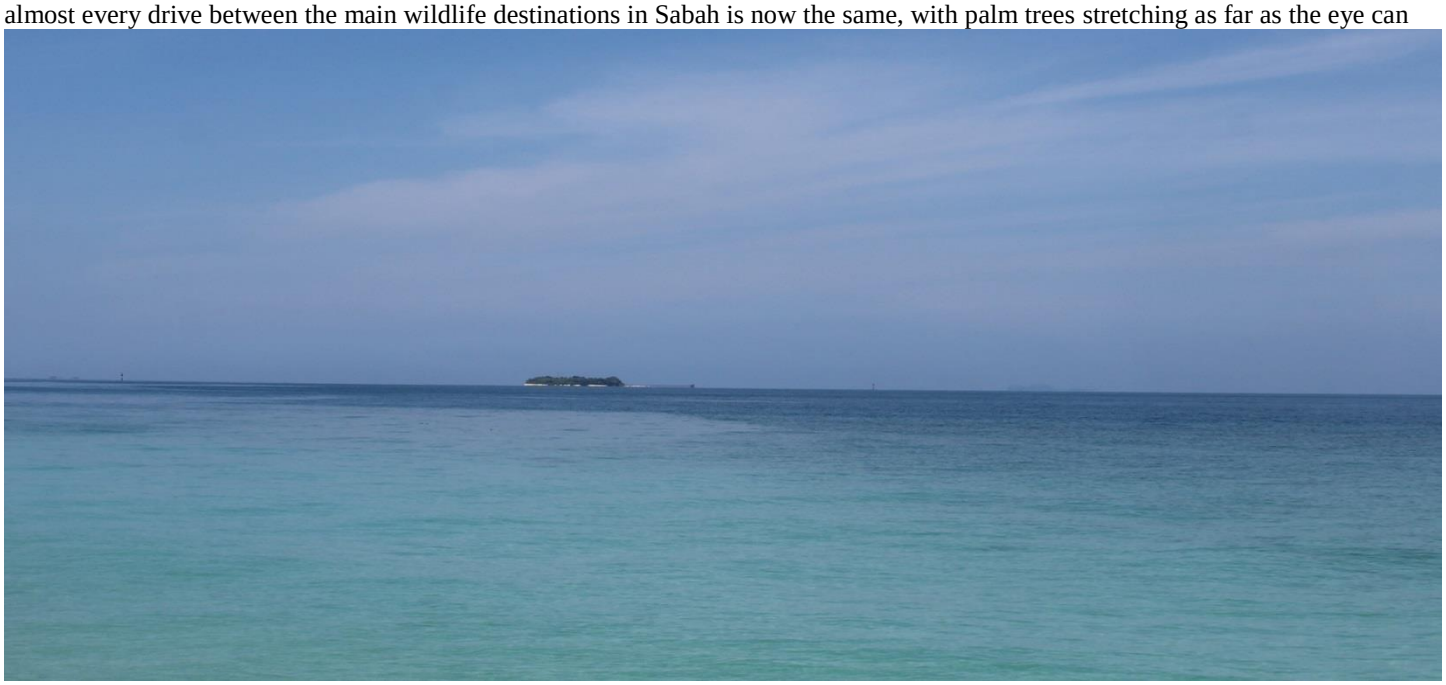
Shared between Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, the island of Borneo is one of the most alluring destinations on the planet for wildlife enthusiasts and even the word Borneo conjures an evocative blend of dark untamed jungle and mysterious exotic animals. The reality over the last few decades has been very different, as millions of hectares of forest have been destroyed to make way for the palm oil plantations that now blight the landscape and many of the most enigmatic animals imaginable have been allowed to slide towards extinction. I made a conscious decision to stop visiting Borneo several years ago when the devastation was at its worst and on one soul-destroying journey between Lahad Datu and Sandakan I counted 96 massive trucks transporting huge logs from freshly cut primary forest. Even five years ago the drive into Sukau would have been through jungle, but now it is just another bland journey through a seemingly never-ending expanse of soulless palm trees. Although comparable habitat destruction is occurring all over the globe, Amazonia is being demolished on a scale that dwarfs even that of Borneo, the degeneration of this once enchanting island has been a very public affair, as Borneo has been a popular tourist destination for many years and a succession of international visitors have witnessed the desolation at close quarters. So bad is the situation in some areas, that the local guides now prepare you for the bleak long drives through a sea of plantations with standard phrases and rehearsed explanations. '50% for the people and 50% for the animals' was a common almost apologetic mantra and one particularly indoctrinated guide explained, completely sincerely and without the slightest trace of irony, that the forests had to be obliterated to stop impoverished villagers illegally felling trees in them and poaching the resident wildlife, which of course they still do as the riches earned from the booming palm oil prices pass them by

and fail to improve their subsistence lifestyles. It was against this background that I decided to return to Borneo, partly to assess the latest situation for myself and also to determine whether some of the conservation iniatives that I had learned of were genuine efforts to finally protect such a precious environment, or were the usual insignificant efforts made by governments to mask further devastation and appease the masses. Smaller than Greenland and New Guinea, Borneo is the third largest island in the world and the largest by a distance in Asia. It is also one of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet with a claim to fame that more species of flora and fauna exist in ten square kilometres of primary Bornean forest than in the whole of North America and Europe combined. Whilst almost three quarters of the island is owned by Indonesia, Brunei administers just one percent and the remaining area is divided between the two Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, I decided to concentrate my efforts solely on Sabah, as that is the region that I am most familiar with and had been informed was making the most progress in terms of conservation. I will have to assess the other areas at a later date, but what I discovered regarding the Indonesia and Sarawak sections of the island was far from encouraging and I fear the worst if even half the reports I received are accurate. A lot of people are already aware of the extensive deforestation across Borneo, but far less understand that the British, a few millennia after eradicating our own broad leaf ancient forests, were responsible for levelling the virgin forests of the region and introducing the infamous African Oil Palm, as well as several other profitable crops. Malaysia, or the Malay Kingdoms at the time, was once part of the British Empire and, like all colonies of Empire, was utilised to fund further British expansion across the globe and to provide the raw materials and food necessary to sustain the largest single domain the world has ever known. Although as a global community we of course should now be more enlightened, it is somewhat difficult for me to take the moral high ground and fully condemn a practice that was initiated by my compatriots, particularly as scarcely a native forest remains intact in Britain and we continue to persecute our own wildlife, or at least the wildlife that has survived the major extinctions of the last thousand years. Upon independence the Malaysians simply followed our lead, but they did it more thoroughly and over time, as the price of the other crops, principally rubber, cocoa and tobacco, all fell, so the price of palm oil increased and it became the dominant cash crop across most of the region. Malaysia and neighbouring Indonesia are by far the largest

producers of palm oil in the world and whilst the government of Malaysia has promised to conserve that oft quoted figure of 50% of all forest, no such commitments have emerged from Indonesia, where palm oil production is likely to almost double over the next few years. Only time will tell whether the Malaysian pledge to protect half of the jungle is a genuine one or not, but it should be noted that the promise is to preserve 50% of all forest cover and not to specifically protect primary forest, which means that areas already logged and cleared will be included within the preservation quota, as long as they are covered by forest of some kind. This will do little to safeguard the biodiversity of the island and the other great danger is that so much emphasis has been placed on palm oil production, over half a million workers are employed in the process in Malaysia alone, the region's economy would be severely damaged if the crop no longer remained viable. It would only take the price of palm oil to fall suddenly, which could undoubtedly occur if the

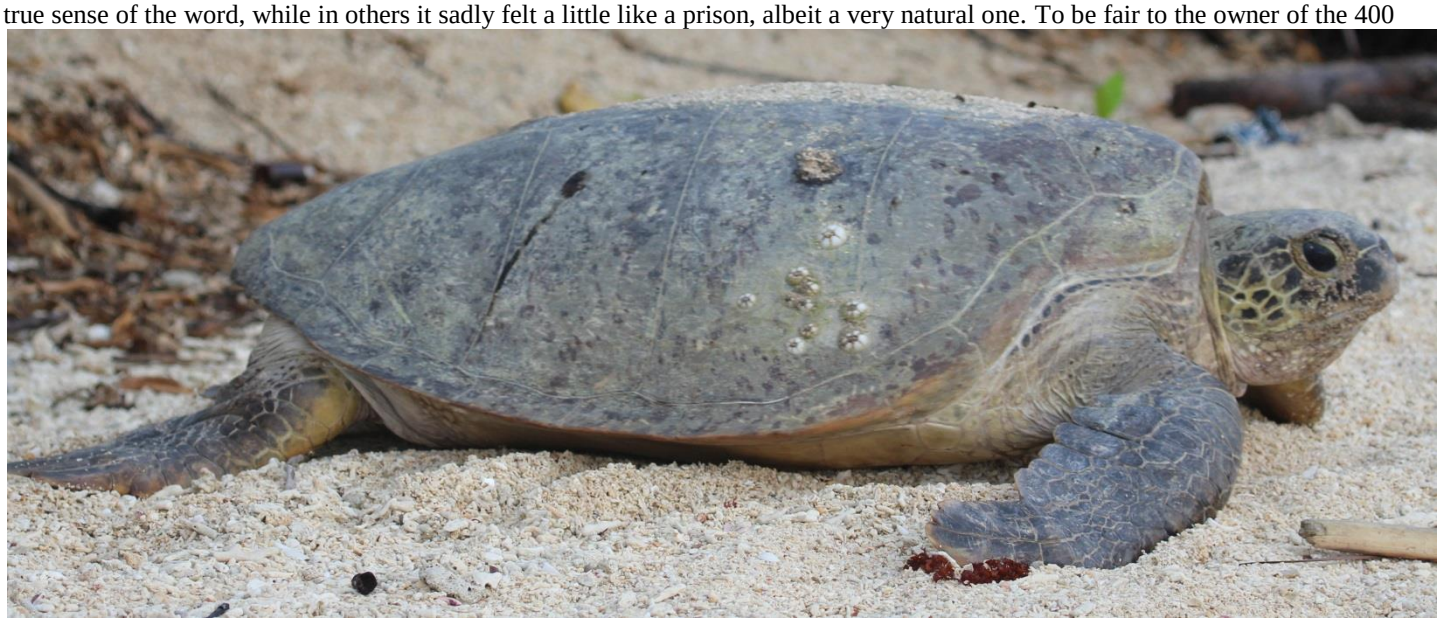
Indonesian expansion continues unchecked, or for one virulent disease to savage an ocean of plantations, and the poorest areas, which include both Sabah and Sarawak, would be further deprived, almost certainly resulting in widespread deforestation and an increase in the poaching that has already ravaged so much of Borneo's wildlife. Despite these reservations and my previous experiences, I attempted to travel with an open mind and I also decided that I would not search for any specific animals on this occasion, as I had already seen all but the rarest mammals of the region and more wanted to discover which animals were now likely to be encountered in a land that I knew had changed considerably since my last visit. The results were mixed to say the least, as more or less each destination produced a number of exceptional wildlife highlights, but the vast majority also emphasised just how much damage has been done within Sabah at least and how serious the situation has become for various keystone species, some of which are unlikely to survive without a major change in attitude and a massive conservation effort on their behalf. My tour began in earnest at Kinabalu Park, one of Malaysia's oldest national parks and a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2000. Given its altitudinal range, from not a great deal higher than sea level to 4,095m at the peak of the impressive Mount Kinabalu, after which the park is named, Kinabalu incorporates an almost unique array of differing ecosystems and literally thousands of plant species, including almost a thousand distinct orchids. A large number of the plants are endemic to just this one park and the area is also known as a premier birding destination, with over 300 recorded species, more than half the birds found in all of Borneo. As in so many parts of the world, the vast majority of the guides are specialised birding guides and it took me even longer than usual to explain to the guide that would be with me for the first few days of my trip, that whilst I was interested in all wildlife and would occasionally stop to either admire or photograph a particularly striking bird, I was not interested in searching for every tiny warbler imaginable or spending hours waiting for a bird that he had heard to finally reveal itself. Although he gave the usual horrified look when I informed him that I was more interested in searching for mammals, particularly extremely rare mammals, by the end of our time together we had come to a mutually acceptable compromise, whereby I would avoid killing him if he could avoid stomping along the trails like a baby elephant, thereby ruining my already remote chances of encountering anything that did not fly obligingly into view. To be fair, despite a lack of knowledge in terms of how to look for anything that did not have feathers, he knew our destinations well enough and turned out to be a decent and hardworking guide. I did not use him a great deal at Kinabalu and instead spent the majority of my time walking the trails along the heavily forested slopes, with the outside possibility of encountering a Malay weasel, a Bornean ferret badger, which have really only ever been consistently recorded at Kinabalu, or a hose's palm civet, another extremely rare species known from only a handful of museum specimens. Not surprisingly, I had no luck with any of these elusive creatures and had to content myself with half a dozen different squirrels, most of which I identified from photographs with the assistance of another guide who thankfully knew the park extremely well. The assorted squirrels aside, the highlight of my stay occurred at a concrete viewing platform, when I placed my hand on the metal railing only to belatedly notice that it was within maybe two inches of a fairly large and apparently bemused snake. The snake turned out to be harmless enough, but the rather beautiful sighting was somewhat marred by a matriarchal local old

lady who took her role a little too seriously and, after allowing her entire family to photograph the snake from every conceivable angle, attempted to kill it with her walking stick. After explaining that snakes were actually allowed within a national park and that if she did not desist she was going to enjoy a far closer view of Kinabalu than anticipated, she eventually departed and the fortunate reptile slithered off unharmed. It had not been the most glorious of starts to the trip, but I had enjoyed the freedom to walk unaccompanied and was very much looking forward to the next stage of the tour and a rare opportunity to watch a turtle laying her eggs at night. Before what I was hoping would be a special experience, I had to endure the almost heart-breaking drive from Kinabalu to Sandakan, which at one time would have been through largely pristine forest, but which now only confirms just how much land has been lost to the palm oil plantations. This is what the guides attempt to prepare you for even at the airport with their carefully rehearsed speeches, but of course it actually does little to lessen the impact of driving past row after row of featureless plantations and almost every drive between the main wildlife destinations in Sabah is now the same, with palm trees stretching as far as the eye can



see and sadly well beyond. Every inch of spare land is committed to this controversial crop and there is no real escape even when you reach the protected areas, as the majority are surrounded by plantations and the local guides, understandably and quite correctly given the high concentrations of migrant predators, often abandon the few and difficult jungle roads and instead take visitors to look for wildlife in the actual plantations. I will cover this in greater detail later in this report, but the irony was not lost on me throughout the trip, as I spent countless hours searching the jungle for animals with often very little success and would then find maybe five or six species of small carnivore within an hour of entering an area that had been totally ruined in terms of its original biodiversity. After the colder climes of the higher altitudes of Kinabalu, it was nice to return to the searing heat of the lowlands and within a few minutes of arriving at Sandakan I was on a boat, speeding towards my next destination, Selingan Island. Unfortunately the initial part of the journey was blemished by a huge amount of floating debris and although the further we moved from the mainland and its surrounding island communities, the more things improved, it was not lost on me, or on the workers of the turtle conservation project that I was about to visit, that I had passed enough plastic bags on one short transfer to kill dozens of turtles. Selingan is one of three islands that form Turtle Islands Park, the Malaysian section of a larger protected area that includes ten islands, the other seven belong to the Philippines, all of which are breeding grounds for the endangered green turtle and the critically endangered hawksbill turtle. Selingan itself is tiny and whilst it was nice to cool down briefly in the refreshing waters of the Sulu Sea, the area designated for snorkelling was far too shallow to be productive and I spent most of my time exploring the island and photographing the many resident monitor lizards. These massive reptiles were to become a constant feature and I saw well over a hundred in all throughout the trip. As the turtles lay their eggs at night, the beach is out of bounds between 6pm and 6am and before dinner the rangers show a film on the important conservation work being undertaken on these islands. In addition to protecting the turtles nesting grounds and preventing the poaching of their eggs, the rangers collect the eggs and transfer them to a hatchery where they are buried in an incubation chamber in the sand. Some of the eggs are buried in direct sunlight and others in the shade, as the temperature of the eggs will ultimately determine which sex each turtle will be. When they finally hatch, the young are released directly into the ocean,

thereby greatly reducing the mortality rate of the tiny turtles, which are otherwise predated on in great numbers before they can reach the relative safety of the water. We would be able to witness each stage of the process, but unfortunately 'we' actually referred to 28 people on this occasion and I knew that it was likely to be a fairly impersonal affair with so many people jostling for a better view and pictures around just the one turtle that we were allowed to observe. I was also slightly unlucky with the weather, as you always expect maybe a couple of hours of rain each day at this time of year in Borneo, but generally the downpours are torrential and end almost as quickly as they begin. Unfortunately, Typhoon Florita, which had been battering the Philippines for the previous couple of days, coincided with my visit and that night I suffered the first real effects of a disrupted weather pattern that would hinder my progress for much of the next four weeks. In truth, I am not actually sure how much of the unseasonal and prolonged rain was as a result of the typhoon. Certainly locals continued to mention it whenever it rained for more than three hours, but I have discovered to my detriment in recent years that the world's weather is certainly far less stable than it used to be and that you can no longer automatically rely on the usual weather conditions in even the most predictable regions. Having been snowed on in the Atacama, supposedly the driest desert on earth, I now take nothing for granted and the rain that came down that night on Selingan threatened to ruin the entire event, as the rangers would not take us out with massive streaks of lightning illuminating the island every few seconds. As it was, we all got very lucky, with the elements relenting for just long enough for us to walk the short distance to see a green turtle laying the first of a batch of 101 eggs. The rain commenced again as we watched the eggs being reburied in the hatchery and by the time 48 newly hatched turtles had taken their first tentative steps and disappeared into the ocean, it quickly became apparent just how fortunate we had been, as the heavens again opened and this time the driving rain continued unchecked for the best part of eight hours. The experience had been a mixed one, as it was an absolute privilege to be able to watch such a magnificent creature at such close quarters and in such a vulnerable position. However, as I feared, it was difficult to do so surrounded by so many people and the entire process had been somewhat rushed as the rangers raced the impending storm. I almost wished that I had two nights on the island instead of one, but then I remembered the 6am rule regarding the beach and also one of the rangers mentioning that the turtles often take up to an hour to recover after laying their eggs. It was therefore just possible that if I walked along the beach at exactly 6am, I might be able to find a turtle that had not yet returned to the ocean. On this occasion the gods were definitely with me, as I almost immediately found another green turtle and was able to spend a magical forty minutes alone with her, as the ranger had already removed her eggs and was happy enough to leave me sitting watching at a respectful distance. I have seen turtles laying eggs previously, but have never seen one on land in daylight and it was a truly wonderful experience to watch her exit the nest and slowly make her way back to her ocean home. I hoped that such a special sighting would be the first of many as I made the short boat transfer back to Sandakan and the even shorter road transfer to the proboscis monkey sanctuary at Labuk Bay. It was difficult to know what to make of the sanctuary, as these were actually wild proboscis monkeys, but sadly their home had been largely destroyed and they were now living in a relatively small section of mangrove forest, surrounded by palm oil plantations and the ocean. They had absolutely nowhere left to go, so in some ways it was a sanctuary in the true sense of the word, while in others it sadly felt a little like a prison, albeit a very natural one. To be fair to the owner of the 400

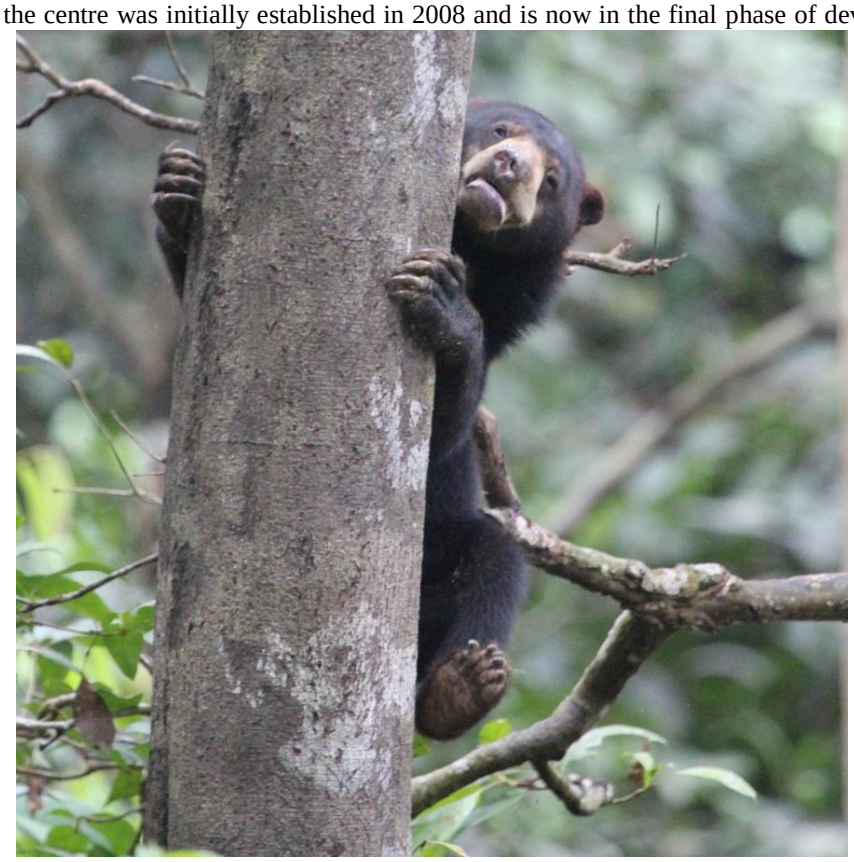


acre site, the land was originally purchased for commercial development and would have become another palm oil plantation had he not taken an interest in the resident primates, which are endemic to Borneo and can only be found in swampy areas or riverine forest, possibly because the mineral content of the soil is far higher in these habitats and these minerals are believed to form a necessary part of their diet. Concerned that the monkeys did not have sufficient food to sustain them in such a reduced area, the new owner instigated a programme of supplementary feeding, which has continued to this day, allowing visitors to observe the monkeys from two large viewing platforms. While in some ways it was difficult to watch wild monkeys being fed, and certainly so much of their home should not have been destroyed in the first place, the alternative does not bear thinking about and the monkeys themselves appear to be thriving. I counted a number of young during my visit and they were displaying all of the natural behaviour that I would frequently observe later on in the trip along the Kinabatangan River. Large dominant males controlled small groups of breeding females and each specific troop fed in an isolated area, as they do from tree to tree along the riverbank. The highly distinctive monkeys aside, the other great benefit of the sanctuary is that it protects an important mangrove ecosystem and a huge number of other animals. I saw various birds, crabs and mudskippers on one short walk and, despite some major reservations, I left more encouraged than I had arrived. The sanctuary conserves only a very small section of land, but it could easily not exist at all and it is one of those tiny projects that offers at least a modicum of hope amid a sea of widespread greed and apathy. The next conservation initiative on my itinerary would be a far more famous one, as we drove the short distance to Sepilok and the renowned Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, which was opened by an Englishwoman in 1964 to care for young orangutans orphaned largely by the logging industry and to eventually return them to the wild. This is one of the projects that Wild Globe supports and I was very much looking forward to returning after a long absence, not only to spend time with such incredibly endearing primates at close quarters, but to also learn more regarding the current plight of the Bornean orangutan, one of two

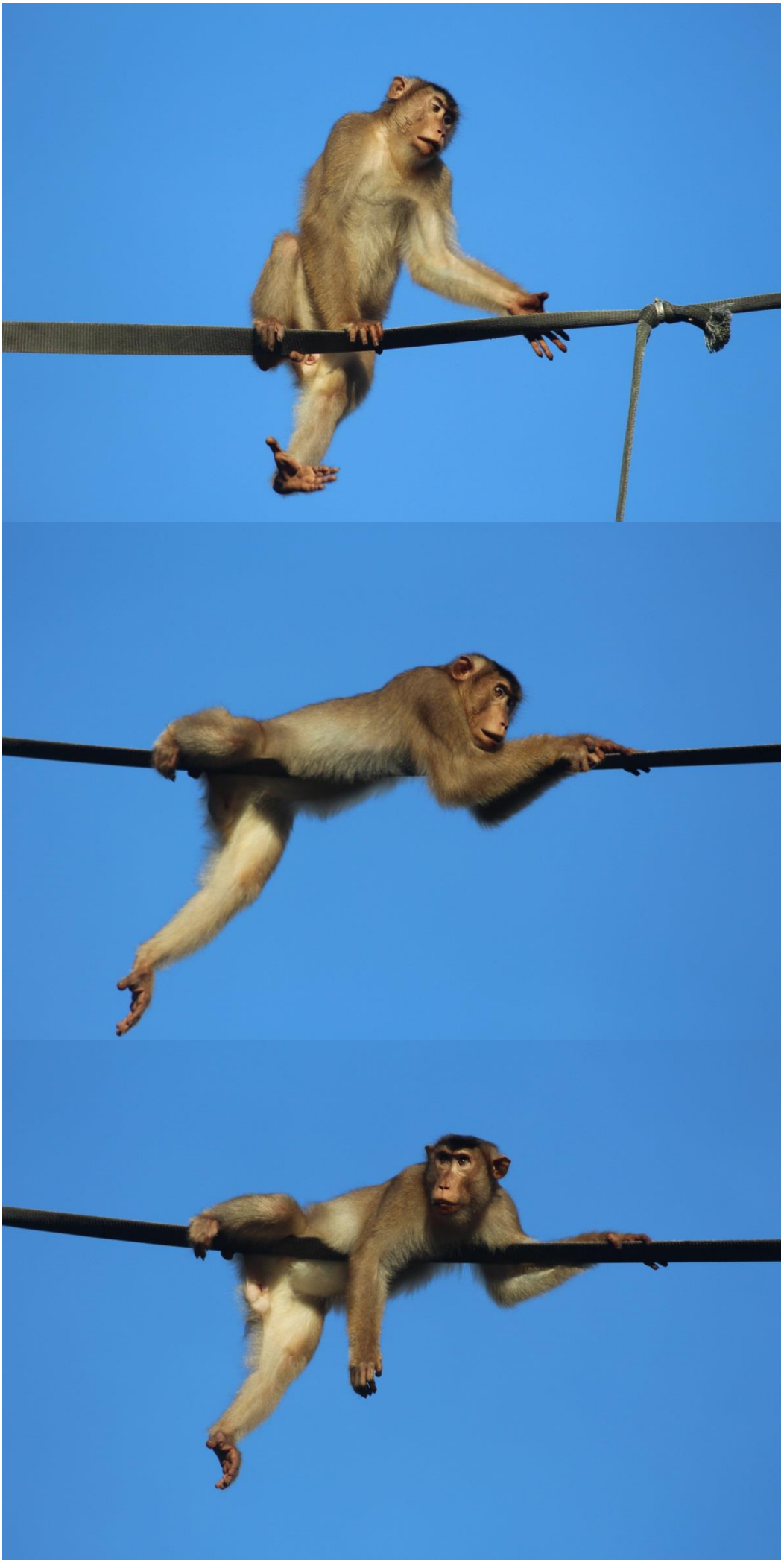
orangutan species and one of only six great apes, all of which are either endangered or critically endangered. I had three nights at Sepilok in all, as I also wanted to spend time spotlighting within the Kabili Sepilok Forest Reserve, where the rehabilitation centre is based, and at the nearby Rainforest Discovery Centre. After several days of birds, reptiles, squirrels and semi-wild primates, it was finally time to start searching in earnest for some of the rarer mammals that I expected to find during the course of my trip. Before I did so, I visited the orangutans and had a long conversation with a very helpful representative of Orangutan Appeal UK, who raise

funds for the centre and orangutan conservation in general. She basically informed me that although there is a common perception that orangutan numbers are increasing in some areas of Sabah, and that I would often hear guides espousing this view regarding both the orangutan and the Borneo pygmy elephant, there is little reliable evidence to corroborate these claims. She added that at best numbers may be stabilising in Sabah as the deforestation gradually slows, but across the rest of Borneo the situation remains dire, almost entirely due to the extensive habitat loss caused by both legal and illegal logging. Forest fires and poaching, both for meat and for the pet trade, remain serious problems, as orangutans can take almost a decade to raise a single young and even a very low rate of hunting is not sustainable for this species in the long-term. Whilst deeply depressing, the news was not unexpected, as I follow the projects that I am involved with closely, as well as many others across the globe, and was already aware that the fragmented populations of Bornean orangutans remained in serious decline. The situation for the Sumatran orangutan is even worse and so dire has the plight of the world's great apes become, that in 2001 the United Nations launched GRASP, the Great Apes Survival Partnership. Sadly, given that the numbers of all six great apes continue to decrease at an untenable rate, the UN have been as ineffectual in the field of wildlife conservation as they have in almost every other area and the ten million US dollars they have raised over a thirteen year period is a fairly pitiful amount considering the countries and international organisations involved. Having said that, what chance do a few primates have when you consider that the UN stood by and watched the genocide of well over half a million Tutsi Rwandans in 1994 and have failed to react effectually regarding almost every recent humanitarian disaster. At least at Sepilok a real difference is being made, if only to the lives of a few of these gentle creatures, many of which are returned to the wild and then monitored for a full year to ensure that they can survive independently. I visited the centre a few times during my stay and although the experience from the viewing platforms, always crowded with tourists when the orangutans are fed, does not really rate as a memorable wildlife encounter, it is at least heartening to see such interest in the apes and to know that every visitor is helping to protect an entire species. The orangutans are incredibly tolerant and gentle around people and on several occasions I watched as apes of all sizes strolled among the visitors, including one particularly relaxed individual, that climbed over the roof of the administration building before wandering happily across the lawn and disappearing into the adjacent Sun Bear centre. In addition to the orphans being rehabilitated to be returned to the wild, Sepilok is home to a number of orangutans that cannot survive independently, some of which have had young, as well as several naturally occurring orangutans that occasionally visit the feeding stations for a free meal or to check out the available females. Although most tourists leave Sepilok with the hope of seeing a 'wild' orangutan when they move on to the Kinabatangan River or Tabin, there is a reasonable chance that they will have already done so. I have no idea if any of the apes that I viewed at the rehabilitation centre were genuinely wild or not, but I did find a wild one at the Rainforest Discovery Centre and encountered over 30 more during the course of the trip, including at least one at every remaining destination and several whilst walking trails on my own. The number of sightings was greatly encouraging, but most guides are keenly aware that the vast majority of casual guests are only interested in orangutans, elephants, proboscis monkeys and perhaps gibbons and often do not make a great deal of effort to look any further than these few high profile animals. The birding guides apart, many of whom I know are excellent, the standard of general guiding is therefore fairly poor and the activities at the lodges are also completely inadequate in terms of looking for the more elusive animals. Most lodges offer either a boat ride or drive, depending on

their location, in the morning and afternoon and at best an hour out at night spotlighting for nocturnal mammals. The activity in the morning does not start early enough to be productive and, when you consider the high number of interesting nocturnal animals in the region, certainly in relation to the limited number that can be easily viewed during the day, an hour each evening is more or less useless. I largely avoided the problem by hiring specific guides before I travelled and by booking additional activities at far more appropriate times. The first of these were at Sepilok, where I arranged two extended night walks at the Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre and another at the Rainforest Discovery Centre, where I had already seen southern pig-tailed and long-tailed macaques during the day, as well as several prevost's squirrels and the only giant squirrel of the entire tour. The discovery centre is certainly worth a visit, with a number of enjoyable trails and a huge variety of attractive birds, both on the forest floor and from the impressive canopy walkway and towers. I was less successful at night, as I knew that both the Bornean slow loris and the western tarsier were encountered reasonably regularly here and was slightly disappointed that I was not able to find either. Instead I had good views of three different species of flying squirrel, including a number of spectacular 'flights' directly overhead whilst on the canopy walkway, as well as a tarantula. A second night here would have been good, but instead I had two long night walks at the rehabilitation centre and was rewarded with first sightings of bearded pig and lesser oriental chevrotain, or lesser mousedeer as it is more commonly known. The main highlight of both walks was a prolonged view of a very calm banded palm civet, which was difficult to photograph in the dense undergrowth, as per almost every animal on the trip, but which did not seem at all perturbed by my light and continued to forage fairly close to the path for at least a couple of minutes, which is almost as good as it gets with many nocturnal carnivores. Given my interest in small carnivores, particularly civets and mustelids, this was a real bonus and I would not see another banded palm civet throughout the trip. My final destination at Sepilok was to the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre, a project that I had already been in touch with from the UK with a view to supporting, depending on what I discovered on what would be my first visit, as the centre was initially established in 2008 and is now in the final phase of development. As with so many animals across the globe, habitat loss and commercial hunting are the major threats to the sun bear and many are still poached for the obscene bile trade, where the bile of the gall bladder is milked for use in traditional, for traditional read backward, Chinese medicine. In several Asian countries, both Asiatic black bears and sun bears are commercially farmed for their bile, living in appalling conditions before being killed after just a few years when they are no longer as productive as a younger bear that has almost certainly been poached from the wild. Whilst I have always tried to avoid condemning any one country or culture, the fact is inescapable that the Chinese are now responsible for more atrocities across the globe than any other single nation, from the slaughter of rhinos and elephants for their horns and ivory, to the biblical scale destruction of tens of millions of turtles and sharks every year, the latter of which are killed purely for their fins and the growing Chinese delicacy of shark fin soup. Even the 700 or so zoos in China are horrific, as the animals are viewed as easily replaceable commodities and no funds are devoted to their care or welfare. They live in the most inexcusable conditions imaginable and in 2010 eleven Siberian tigers starved to death in Shenyang Forest Wild Animal Zoo. For such an ancient civilisation to behave in this way in the 21st century beggars belief, although it is perhaps not surprising that they have so little concern for wildlife when you consider that up to one hundred thousand baby Chinese girls are murdered or abandoned by their own parents every year. There are now over 40,000 orphanages in China and around a million female foetuses are aborted annually. Males already outnumber females by about 20 million across the country and this figure is increasing by almost one and a half million each year, which will of course eventually lead to a massive imbalance between the sexes and an absence of partners for millions of men. All of the major players on the world stage are aware of these



statistics and what a blight the Chinese now are on the planet, but no one country or organisation is prepared to make a stand against them, as the Chinese are now the biggest players of all, the most powerful nation on earth, with almost limitless resources and a financial stake in every country that can benefit them in terms of minerals, oil, timber and dead animals. While other countries have historically attempted global domination by force of arms, the Chinese are simply buying it and if any of this sounds exaggerated, I have stood in Selous game reserve, one of Africa's great wilderness areas, in communist Tanzania, surrounded by butchered elephants, their rotting carcases riddled with bullets and their skulls hacked to pieces where the tusks have been extracted with axes. Almost half the elephants in Selous, approaching 40,000, have been killed for their ivory in less than four years and it is well known that a great deal of this ivory has left the country in the diplomatic bags of Chinese officials. Of course not every individual Chinese national is responsible for the sins of their state and it is nice to be able to mention that the founder of the Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre is Malaysian Chinese and that he is deeply committed to the continued survival of this beautiful bear. The centre that he has created is certainly very impressive and should become an automatic destination for anyone visiting Borneo. Certainly any future tours that I arrange in Sabah will include all three of the Sepilok conservation projects that I visited on this occasion and I have already added the Sun Bear centre to the projects that I support financially. The centre currently cares for over 30 bears, some of which will be returned to the wild after a period of rehabilitation and others which sadly cannot survive independently and will spend the rest of their days as ambassadors for the project, living a harmonious life in an entirely natural environment. I thoroughly enjoyed watching a few of the agile bears climbing and foraging contentedly in the forest and later on in the trip I had a very special experience with the same animal, albeit a totally wild one. Meanwhile, having already spent almost a week in Borneo, it was time to move on to the first predominantly wild destination of the tour, the Kinabatangan River. As I made the easy journey, initially by road to Sandakan and then by boat, to the first of two lodges that I would use whilst exploring along the river, I reflected that the trip would now begin in earnest in many ways and that the intense heat and often stifling humidity would notch up another couple of levels as soon as I entered the jungle. If I am completely honest, despite their astounding biodiversity, I have never entirely enjoyed looking for wildlife in either tropical or temperate rainforests and would rather spend a week in the Pantanal than a month deep inside the Amazon. Although the heat is never an issue, I much prefer wide open spaces, particularly savannah and desert environments, and I struggle slightly with the lack of freedom and accessibility in the jungle, where it is more or less impossible to walk far from a trail and some wildlife viewing often becomes a matter of simply hoping the animal will come to you. I knew that it would not be quite as demanding along the Kinabatangan River, as we would be able to explore many of the pretty tributaries and oxbow lakes, but a great deal of patience was going to be required whilst on land, where it is often more productive to sit quietly at a suitable location than continually traipse the same trails for days on end. I had eight nights in all on the river, as I wanted to try a lodge in the popular Sukau area that I was already familiar with, as well as a second in a more remote area away from the main tourist lodges. I had four nights at each and had booked a number of additional and extended boat trips, as well as private guides. Before I travelled I had read that the Sukau region now gets very busy and I experienced this on my first afternoon, when we emerged from one channel to discover around 40 boats jostling for position on one side of the river. Apparently a small herd of elephants had been spotted on the riverbank and now there was a noisy armada waiting for them to reappear from the long grass. I immediately told my guide to forget it and move on, as I have never been interested in viewing animals in those conditions and had been informed, again while I was arranging the trip, that these situations can become so bad, as all of the guides attempt to get their guests as close to the elephants as possible for better pictures, that elephants have been drowned as they become disorientated by the noisy motors or find their path to the riverbank blocked. I wanted nothing at all to do with that type of inexcusable scenario and did not give the matter much more thought until I was out on



the river again the next morning and caught the unmistakable odour of a decaying elephant. There is nothing on earth quite like this sickening smell and although I could not immediately see a carcass, it only took a minute or two to find a dead adult elephant floating upside down in the water. I have no way of knowing whether this was a natural death, as older elephants do spend much of the time at the water's edge eating the softer vegetation, but it was hardly an auspicious start to my time on the river. Happily, the mood was lifted later that morning when we arrived at one of the rope bridges placed across the river to allow orangutans to cross, as these huge apes do not swim and need to move between their now fragmented feeding grounds. Instead of an orangutan, the bridge was being used by a pig-tailed macaque, which are agile enough, but not in the same way as orangutans, which would simply hang from the rope and swing slowly across. The macaque on the other hand, was attempting to walk across on all fours and was clearly struggling. On several occasions he fell and whilst it seemed unlikely that he would actually end up in the river, he was clearly not so sure and clung to the rope for all he was worth with an expression that flitted somewhere between abject terror and total bemusement. During the day primates are the main attraction along the river and, in addition to both macaque species and a large number of proboscis monkeys, my guide and I both spotted distant orangutans. I was actually watching one through binoculars when my guide noticed a red variant of the Sunda flying lemur. As is often the case with these peculiar looking mammals, which resemble giant flying squirrels when they are resting flat against a tree, this one was very high and although I clambered up the riverbank in an attempt to get slightly closer, the perspective was no better on land and I again had to settle for a view through my binoculars. My four nights at the first lodge were fairly quiet, but I did add two new primates, a small troop of silvered langurs during the day and a western tarsier at night. I was particularly excited to find the tarsier, as they are very interesting nocturnal primates which give absolutely no eyeshine, making them difficult to spot. I again climbed out of the boat to get a better photograph and less than a second later the tarsier was gone, as these creatures can leap almost six metres and this one had jumped without me even being able to see where it had landed. A few crocodiles and several snakes aside, including some spectacular reticulated pythons, my only other success on the river at night was a brief glimpse of a common palm civet and a solitary bearded pig. It was not a great return for so many hours and I also spent at least a couple of hours spotlighting in the grounds of the lodge each evening without much luck. I had been informed that a Sunda stink badger occasionally makes an appearance, but sadly not during my stay and all I could find was a few brown rats and a lot more bats. One afternoon I took a short break to visit the Gomantong Caves, home to around two million bats, seven distinct species have been recorded here, and the three types of swiftlets that produce the edible nests harvested twice a year for bird's nest soup. Due to time restrictions I only visited the lower cave on this occasion and after running the gauntlet of cockroaches and poisonous cave centipedes along the walkway, I retired to the fresh air beyond the cave to savour the sight of black clouds of bats pouring into the sky. Several were immediately snatched by the few opportunist raptors that always predate around the cave entrance, but the vast majority flew on untroubled, hopefully directly to my lodge to despatch several million insects. Before we arrived, I had asked to walk along the main road that leads to the caves and was rewarded with great views of a small troop of highly distinctive maroon langurs, the seventh primate of the trip out of the ten that can be found in Sabah. I was also lucky on the forest boardwalk that runs between the registration office and the cave complex, with a very brief glimpse of what appeared to be a short-tailed mongoose on the way and a much better view of a lesser oriental chevrotain on the way back. Despite not seeing a massive amount, I had largely enjoyed my stay in the Sukau area and had not been overly troubled by a great deal of traffic on the river since that first afternoon. The only real problem was the lack of a decent trail to explore and this was corrected when I moved on to the next lodge, about forty minutes away by boat. Within a couple of minutes of my arrival, I was photographing the bearded pigs and monitor lizards that descend on the scraps thrown out by the friendly staff and as I dropped my bag off in my room, I immediately spotted the first Bornean gibbon of the

trip. I did not have a great view on this occasion, but the gibbons visited the rustic camp fairly often and I delayed a morning boat ride two days later to spend about half an hour watching them swinging acrobatically through the trees. Gibbons are astonishing animals and their characteristic whooping calls, which grow louder and louder as they build towards a crescendo, are one of the most evocative sounds of the jungle. It was certainly a wonderful start and I had more success at this lodge, partly due to the excellent

forest trail that I walked on a regular basis and also thanks to my guide, who knew how difficult nocturnal animals are to find along the river and took me to a local area to spend time spotlighting along the road and in a palm oil plantation. We also spent much longer on the river and were consequently able to observe a large number of orangutans, including six on one afternoon cruise. A few were fairly distant, but we spent over an hour watching a young orangutan feeding on fruits just above his mother and I also savoured almost as long with a sole female on the lodge trail. I was walking on my own at the time and it was incredibly satisfying to sit and quietly watch such a majestic ape undisturbed. The trail was actually highly productive in terms of a number of primates, including gibbons, a first proper view of a common palm civet and a very exciting encounter with a spitting cobra, which I was one pace away

from stepping on until it hissed aggressively at me and began swaying with its hood expanded. As I always maintain, unless an animal is actively hunting you, which is extremely rare, the majority will generally issue a warning before they attack and this cobra was no exception. It clearly did not want to spray its venom or strike unless necessary and instead allowed me to slowly back away. Frustratingly I had my long lens on and by the time I had retired a couple of metres and was able to use it, the cobra had partially deflated its impressive hood. It was a superb encounter nevertheless and one of the most memorable moments of the entire trip. My other up close and personal encounters on the same trail were marginally less appealing, as the forest floor was covered in leaches and on one occasion I had to remove nine when I returned to my room. Unfortunately I clearly missed one after a late night walk and must have rolled on the fully fed specimen during the night, because when I woke the next morning, the bloody sheets looked as if they had been borrowed from a scene in the Godfather and I spent several minutes searching for the horses head. Whilst I would have to get used to them at later destinations and they were certainly successful, the drives around the plantations were initially far more uncomfortable than even the leaches. Thousands of intricate and highly evolved species would have been eradicated when each area was originally logged and yet, almost perversely, the same despoiled land now attracts a host of small predators hunting the rodents that nest in the palms in vast quantities. Of course there is no real diversity and you are constantly seeing the same species, but when those species are leopard cats, flat-headed cats and Malay weasels, and given how hard it is to find certain animals in the almost impenetrable jungle, you can

certainly understand why so many guides take advantage of them. My guide had no qualms suggesting that we try a plantation on my penultimate evening and within two hours I had seen a common palm civet and the first flat-headed and leopard cats of the tour, as well as a gorgeous oriental bay owl. The only real issue was attempting to get photographs, as the eyeshine of both cats was well beyond the edge of the road and by the time that we had circumvented the electric fences that all of the plantations are surrounded by, we went under one and, rather cautiously, between two electrified wires of the second, the cats were already well aware of our presence. The leopard cat did not overly care and I was able to get a reasonable photograph, but the flat-headed cat ran as soon as we jumped an irrigation ditch blocking our path and, perhaps understandably, did not return. I did consider returning to the plantation on my final night, but was aware that at Tabin one of only three game driving roads was along a massive plantation and therefore decided to spend my last night back on the Kinabatangan River. When we saw another flat-headed cat on the riverbank, I thought that it was probably a good decision, but just a few eventful minutes later I was not so sure. We were already heading back to the lodge when a storm that had been threatening for well over an hour finally erupted and the heavens opened. It was still too hot to bother with a waterproof, but I had my camera on my lap and therefore simply threw the jacket over my head to ensure that my camera and flash were protected. I could no longer see where we were going, but we were only a few minutes from the lodge and I did not want to try and put my camera away in such torrential rain. Suddenly, with absolutely no warning, there was a heavy impact and I was thrown from my seat into the side of the boat, which was no longer moving. I initially thought that we must have hit a log floating in the water, but when I gathered my senses, I saw that we were on land and that the boat driver had crashed into the riverbank. As it was so late, I could only guess that either he or my guide, who had been shining the spotlight to show the driver where to steer, had fallen asleep, as visibility was extremely bad in the heavy rain, but not bad enough to actually miss the river if the light was being directed correctly. Given that we had been returning at full speed, we had been extraordinarily lucky, as we ploughed through a thick patch of reeds several metres deep before hitting the actual bank, which greatly reduced our speed and considerably lessened the impact. If we had struck a section of riverbank with trees instead of reeds at that speed, I do not think that any of us would have walked away and certainly not me at the front of the boat. Although my side ached slightly from where I had been thrown, it was not too bad initially and within a few minutes of returning and checking that my camera equipment had survived the crash, I was attempting to photograph a Malay civet that appeared under one of the staff buildings. It was only the next morning when I tried to get up and could barely move or breathe without severe discomfort, that I realised I had cracked at least a couple of ribs. As I did not have time to seek treatment with such a busy schedule, and knowing that unless you are extremely unlucky damaged ribs just require rest, I decided to continue with the tour uninterrupted. It was the correct decision and things were put into perspective to some degree a few hours later when I discovered that, exactly two weeks after I had flown over the same airspace with the same airline, Malaysia Airlines flight 17 was blown out of the sky by ground-to-air missiles. Almost three hundred people were killed and over the course of the next fortnight, the lodges that I would visit all had rooms available for holidaymakers that would never be able to use them. Several parties due to visit both the Tabin Wildlife Resort and the Borneo Rainforest Lodge were killed and I was simply grateful that I had escaped twice in a matter of days. I did not necessarily express that gratitude to either my guide or the boat driver, although the latter did not speak any English, and probably had to guess exactly what my stream of expletives meant, and the former was very quick to blame the latter, principally because he spoke no English. I resolved the issue by replacing the driver and suggesting to the guide that it would be fairly nice to travel in the conventional manner on our final river trip and that we should perhaps consider utilising the water instead of dry land. This we managed and within a couple of hours I was watching a small herd of elephants and in a greatly improved mood. Having spent eight days on the river, these were the first elephants I had seen, but I was able to spend a long time with them and it was a nice way to end an eventful stay. Although my ribs were extremely painful for a few days, they did not actually stop me doing anything and I moved on to Tabin Wildlife Reserve in fairly good spirits. My optimism was well founded on this occasion, as I

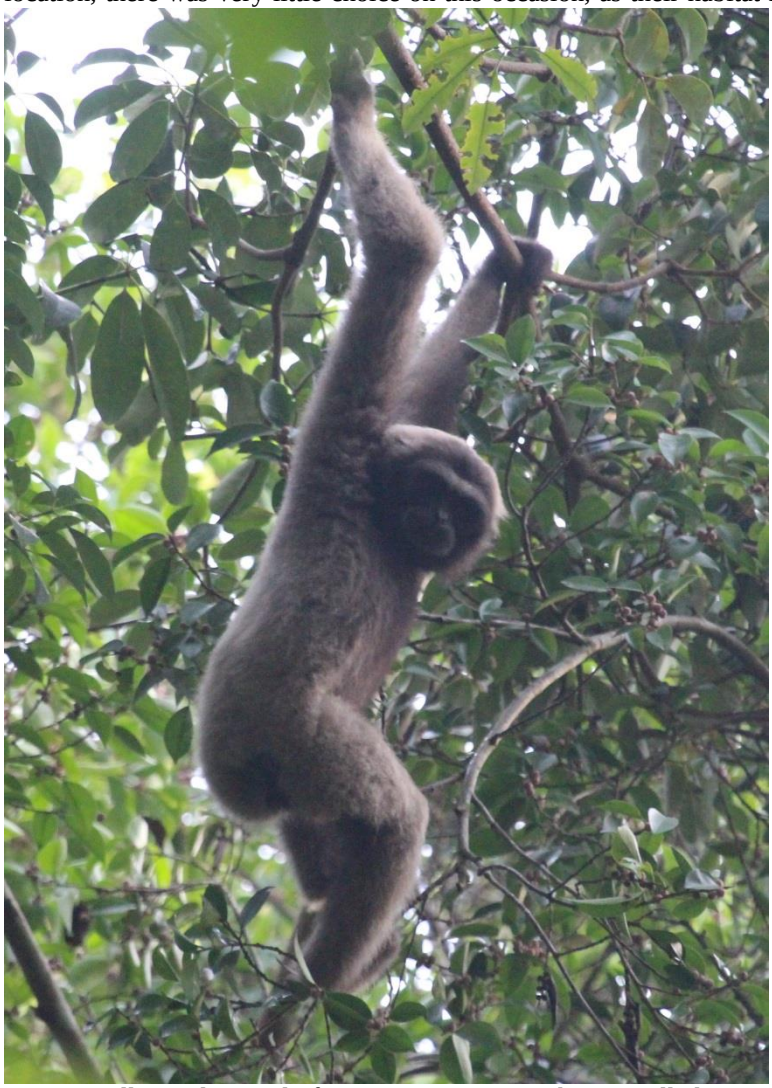
enjoyed my stay at Tabin, principally because I had the best guide of the tour available to me and he was genuinely enthusiastic in terms of wanting to help me look for rare animals. We did not have an extraordinary amount of success considering the hours devoted to the task, but we did find several new species and, as I always try to explain to the regular guides that I use, enthusiasm and friendliness can go a long way with guests, particularly those that have not visited a destination previously. The reserve itself is not large, around 15% the size of Yellowstone in the United States, and only small sections can be accessed via three roads, one of which is the access road from Lahad Datu. Another road cuts along the edge of the reserve and ends at a plantation and the third takes you directly into the forest and then abruptly stops. Considering the levels of poaching and the vulnerability of some of the species that Tabin protects, I do not have any real issue regarding this lack of road access. However, the walking trails are another matter and although Tabin has an entire network of impressive forest trails, none have been maintained since an Australian woman was killed by an elephant in December 2011, the first such fatality in Sabah. You are not allowed to walk the trails without a guide, but the guides now only use one fairly short track and the rest are rapidly being reclaimed by the forest. I ignored the rule on my second day and went for a hike that should have taken about three hours, but ended up taking almost seven because the trails are no longer marked and many lead directly into each other. Whilst I did not feel uncomfortable at any point, and could have simply used the river to return to the lodge, I eventually came out on the road that takes you through the main forest area, which was fine, but would not have been the case if the trails were still being maintained. When I returned my anxious guide was in the process of arranging to go out with dogs to search for me and had already put a rescue helicopter on alert in case I was not found by nightfall. Amused by the excessive concern over what was really just a routine jungle hike, I asked him how I was expected to search that particular trail, when I had to have a guide with me, but the guides would not use it. My ‘Catch-22’ reference was almost certainly lost in translation, but basically forget the ‘Nature Trails’ as advertised if you visit Tabin or any serious jungle exploration, the three major roads are more or less it. Fortunately, the lodge is superbly positioned directly overlooking the river and on my very first night I spotted eight smooth-coated otters running across the rocks at almost midnight. They were the first mustelids of the trip and I spent several hours over the next five days waiting patiently for them to return in daylight. On my final morning, as I photographed a group of gibbons, they finally did and it was a real thrill to watch such incredibly dexterous and graceful creatures hunting just a few metres from me. Given the variety, including 58 distinct species of marten, otter, badger, weasel, polecat and mink, mustelids are among the most interesting of the small carnivores and can be found in more or less every habitat on every continent. I had high hopes of encountering five or six on this trip and although that did not occur, I was absolutely delighted to have a superb view of a Malay weasel. I actually almost missed it, as we had just finished the long drive that ends at the plantation and I had put my camera down to climb out of the vehicle, which was a slightly slow process given the state of

my ribs. My guide had already exited when suddenly our driver shouted weasel and I turned, still half in the vehicle, to see a bright orange blur at the edge of the plantation with a huge rat in its mouth. I had no real idea what to do for a second or so, as my camera was back on the seat and I could either jump down and just enjoy the sighting or scramble back in and hope to be in time to get a picture. Given the rarity of the animal, I chose the latter and just reached my camera in time to take one shot of the weasel bouncing away with the rat still firmly clamped between its jaws. The picture is by no means perfect, some vegetation partially obscured the shot, but I was still elated, as this was only the second Malay weasel I had ever seen and I had not been able to photograph the previous one. My guide and driver were also ecstatic and it was particularly pleasing to see them both so animated over an animal that very few people ever encounter. Indeed, my guide had only seen two before and this was the first for our driver, who insisted that we take a photograph of him in front of the spot where the weasel had appeared. Once again a plantation had delivered an animal that we

would have probably struggled to see in the forest and at Tabin the guides used the first section of the road back to Lahad Datu almost every night to spotlight along, as one side featured forest and the ideal trees for certain species of civet and the other the palm oil plantations. In this way we were able to observe two new civets, masked palm civet and small-toothed palm civet, as well as Malay civet, common palm civet and at least twenty leopard cats, including eleven on one single drive. I would have preferred to spend more time within the jungle at night, as we only chose this option twice and still saw a leopard cat, Malay and common palm civets, several lesser oriental chevrotains and bearded pigs, a western tarsier and a first moonrat, which belongs to the same family as the hedgehog and is not actually a rodent. We also encountered elephants on every night drive and were able to sit and watch a small herd feeding at the edge of the forest on my final afternoon. During the day primates were still dominant and, although I did not appreciate it at the time, I was very fortunate to see a solitary hose's langur, as they are not generally alone and this would be my only sighting of this animal on the trip. I had my guide to thank for what was a very good spot at great distance and it meant that I had now seen nine of Sabah's ten primates. I was only missing the Bornean slow loris, which I had looked for in more trees without success than I believed humanly possible. Other experiences very much compensated, including a dazzling acrobatic display from an entire family of gibbons and several nice encounters with orangutans, which I was immensely pleased to observe at every destination I visited across the trip, excluding the elevated forests of Kinabalu Park. The orangutan highlight at Tabin was a juvenile that had been feeding happily for some time until it abruptly suffered an attack of separation anxiety and began calling raucously for its mother, which we could hear was reasonably close within the lower canopy, but could not actually see. Although the mother responded vocally to the call of her young, that was not sufficient to calm the by now highly agitated ape and it quickly descended towards her before literally throwing itself out of the tree and landing several metres below. My guide and I both instinctively looked at each other in amazement, as orangutans are not meant to be able to jump and we each confirmed that neither of us had seen one do so before. The young orangutan was fine, as we watched it move towards its concealed mother and my guide was delighted at having observed what was new behaviour for him after thirty years of watching these remarkable primates. One of the main purposes of the trip was to learn how likely a guest would be to encounter any of the elusive, high profile animals that Borneo is famous for, including clouded leopard, sun bear, Sumatran rhinoceros and the Borneo bay cat, which has hardly ever even been photographed and has an almost mythical reputation. I had seen both sun bear and clouded leopard previously, although when I saw my only clouded leopard to date, there was only considered to be one species of this cat and since then scientists have decided the type found on Borneo and Sumatra is actually a separate species, known as the Sunda clouded leopard, than those occurring across the rest of Asia. Having spoken to a lot of guides, it appears that these mysterious cats are even harder to find now than was previously the case, which makes sense and was sadly expected considering the extensive habitat loss and illegal hunting that occurs throughout the region. Whilst it is entirely possible to chance upon this animal in Sabah, and I know several individuals who have, you cannot really search for it with anything approaching genuine conviction and finding one would currently be a matter of exceptional good fortune. You can of course increase your chances by searching in the right areas for extended periods, but even then you are relying on one crossing your path, as the guides cannot track these animals through the jungle and they are very rarely observed in the same specific area for more than a day or two at most. Of the 40 or so guides I consulted,

none had seen more than two this year and the vast majority had either seen one or had no luck at all. Worryingly, certainly considering how much time they spend in the most suitable habitat, they all stated that sun bears were even more elusive and several guides had only seen two or three in their entire lives. No one I spoke to had ever encountered a Borneo bay cat, although these secretive animals are now being photographed more regularly in camera traps, and I already knew that the situation regarding the Sumatran rhinoceros was going to be dire, although exactly how dire even I was not prepared for. Perversely, considering they are one of the rarest animals on the planet, it will shortly be possible for visitors to view Sumatran rhinos at Tabin, but only because they are on the very edge of extinction and the Wildlife Department of Sabah have belatedly decided to take action. Whilst it is a high risk

strategy, they have resolved to catch every wild rhinoceros in Malaysian Borneo and move them to one heavily protected breeding site at Tabin, which will be opened to the public in 2016. Pitifully, it may already be too late, as the teams currently dedicated to searching for these animals, have found only four, including a female that has a foot missing, which she ripped off to escape a snare, and cannot support the weight of a male to breed. The last female discovered was initially believed to be pregnant, but horrifically she actually has a huge internal tumour and it is not currently known whether this can be removed and she will survive. On these four animals the hopes of a species rest, in Sabah at least, and although the IUCN suggest a population estimate of around 50 animals in the state, experts on the ground believe that they will be very fortunate to eventually find even ten. Whilst the IUCN are a wonderful organisation and do a superb job highlighting the dire predicament of the planet's flora and fauna, their population estimates often appear to be wildly inaccurate. Across the entire region they suggest a population of between 220 and 275 rhinos, but, based on the situation in Sabah, these figures are likely to be grossly exaggerated and it is reasonable to assume that there are probably less than a hundred Sumatran rhinoceroses remaining in the wild. The action in Sabah has certainly come far too late and while you would never ideally elect to place the last surviving members of a species at one possibly vulnerable location, there was very little choice on this occasion, as their habitat has been so fragmented in recent years, the chances of rhinos even meeting to breed are now extremely low. I briefly visited the large area of forest that the rhinos will hopefully be protected in, a purpose built road will take you through the reserve, and will return at some stage after 2016 to see how the project has progressed and whether these majestic creatures, which I have never seen in the wild, have any chance of long-term survival. Meanwhile, it was time for me to move on to Danum Valley, for four nights at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge and four at the Danum Valley Field Centre. Around a third of the size of Tabin, the Danum Valley Conservation Area protects largely primary forest and the resident wildlife has historically benefited from the fact that this is an area that has never been inhabited. As such, the vast majority is in pristine condition and is home to a diverse array of species, including Borneo bay cats, which have been caught in camera traps along the Danum River. The Borneo Rainforest Lodge is again well situated on the river, but, the short access road that leads to the lodge aside, there is only actually one road to explore and on each drive you can choose to try your luck to either the left or the right. There is a short boardwalk that leads to an excellent viewing platform on the river and an equally impressive canopy walkway about 26m high and around 300m long. The guides are fairly relaxed in terms of guests walking unaccompanied along the main access road, certainly as far as the walkway, but you do require a guide if you want to explore one of the longer jungle trails, which thankfully are regularly used and are consequently well maintained. I had booked four-hour night drives on each of my four evenings, as well as several extended early morning and afternoon sessions. My remaining time was spent either walking or positioned at good vantage points to watch for wildlife. Frustratingly, these vigils were regularly transformed into fairly damp and miserable affairs, as the weather, which had already severely disrupted much of my visit, deteriorated even further at Danum Valley and several of my activities were either cancelled or curtailed. It was a great shame, as I enjoyed considerable success between the downpours and encountered several new species, as well as many of the animals seen at previous destinations. The area was a particularly good one for orangutans and I probably saw at least a dozen, including four feeding together in one fruiting tree. I



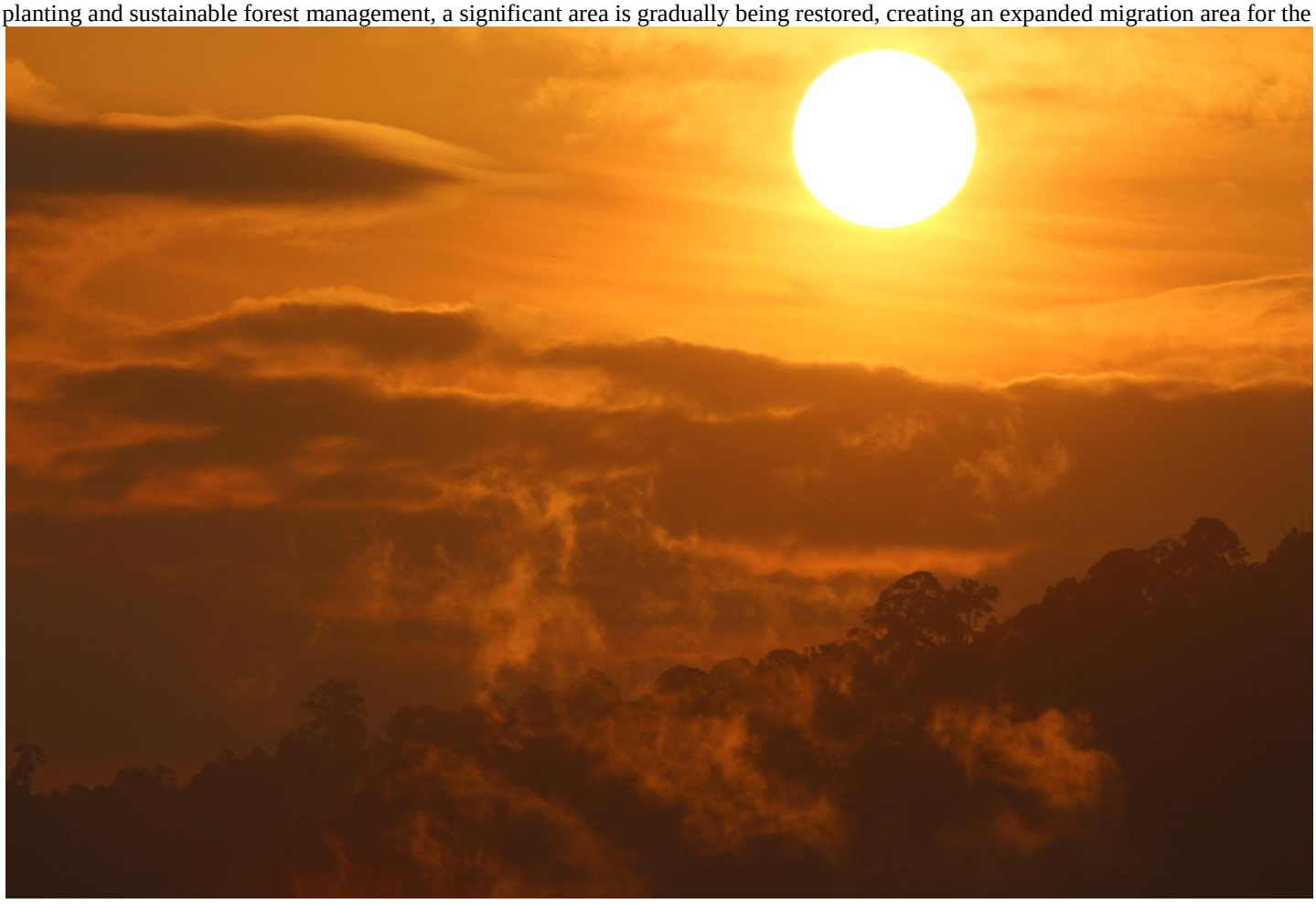
was also able to finally complete the full set of ten primates that occur in Sabah, when I spotted the indicative red eyeshine of a Bornean slow loris, a small nocturnal animal that has the distinction of being one of the few poisonous mammals. The toxin is produced by rubbing or licking a gland on the arm, which is then applied to the teeth to produce a venomous bite. Having taken the best part of three weeks to find one loris, I saw them on successive nights and the second sighting was one of the best of the trip, as the tiny primate emerged from the leaf cover and crept along numerous branches in full view. Other interesting new animals at Danum Valley included striped and painted treeshrews, which were fairly common around the short nature trail beside the lodge, and greater oriental chevrotains, the larger of the two native mousedeer species, which appeared reasonably regularly at dusk at the edge of the

forest. Sambar deer also put in a first appearance, arriving silently at night directly behind my room, and a mottled yellow flying lemur obligingly decided to spend the entire day resting in a relatively low tree beside the lodge. Given the severe difficulty of finding animals other than primates, the guides are always delighted to have a rare creature like this to show their guests and they were even happier a day later when I spotted a young binturong climbing down the trunk of another tree in full fruit. This was my sixth different civet of the tour, and ultimately my last, and although I rushed to try and take a quick photograph before it disappeared, for once I could have actually taken my time. This binturong was not going anywhere and twelve hours later, after every guest had been shown this strange ‘bearcat’ and it had taken several lengthy naps, it was still gorging itself on the rapidly dwindling fruit. For me, this

encounter was one of the absolute highlights of my time in Borneo and I spent extended periods at different points throughout the day, utterly engrossed in the entertaining antics of this engaging animal. Having experienced so many fleeting sightings, particularly with most of the small carnivores, just to be able to savour some uninterrupted natural behaviour was a joy, as the binturong was not particularly close, but at least that ensured it was oblivious to our presence and continued to forage undisturbed. Once the easily accessible fruit had all been harvested and hastily consumed, we were treated to a superb demonstration of the binturong's incredible prehensile tail, which it utilised to hang in mid-air as it collected the fruit that would otherwise have been out of reach. As with the slow loris, I saw another binturong the very next day, although this one was just a large black ball curled up in a tree and I was again able to appreciate just how fortunate we had all been. Given the pristine nature of the forest, which had supposedly never been exposed to any significant hunting, I had thought that I might catch a glimpse of either of the two native muntjac species at Danum Valley, as these small deer are extensively hunted across all of Borneo and are now consequently almost as difficult to find as clouded leopards. This did not occur and I was given a reasonable insight into exactly why when we came across another vehicle whilst spotlighting one evening. We could only periodically hear the car and not actually see it, which of course was intentional, as only poachers drive through a protected area with no headlights. My guide knew exactly what was going on and when the engine noise of the other vehicle appeared to be a little too close, he instructed our driver to turn around, explaining that guides and rangers had been shot by poachers and that we could not risk overtaking them. Theoretically most of Sabah's wildlife receives official protection, but poaching remains rife and several species have been severely and almost irreparably impacted in recent years. Porcupines are being slaughtered in unsustainable numbers for the bezoar stones found in their stomachs, which, and this is probably no great surprise, the enlightened Chinese believe have medicinal powers. Pangolins are being wiped out across both Asia and Africa for much the same reason, as their meat is considered a delicacy and their scales are in great demand for the insatiable Chinese medicine industry. A few months before I was due to travel to Borneo, my attention was drawn to the Mongabay website, which is an excellent source of environmental and conservation news, and an article revealing that between May 2007 and January 2009, an astounding 22,000 pangolins were killed in Sabah alone. The number was in fact almost certainly far higher, as the Sabah Wildlife Department had confiscated documents recording the outrage and over a third of these were missing. Even the known figure of 22,000 is difficult to fully comprehend within less than a two-year period and to locate and kill this many animals, particularly rare animals that are not that easy to find, indicates a vast network that must include countless villages across the state, as well as local officials, guides and probably even wildlife rangers. It is simply inconceivable that carnage on this scale can have been undertaken by a handful of poachers operating independently. Similarly, in 2010 Chinese customs officers seized over 2,000 frozen pangolins and 92 cases of

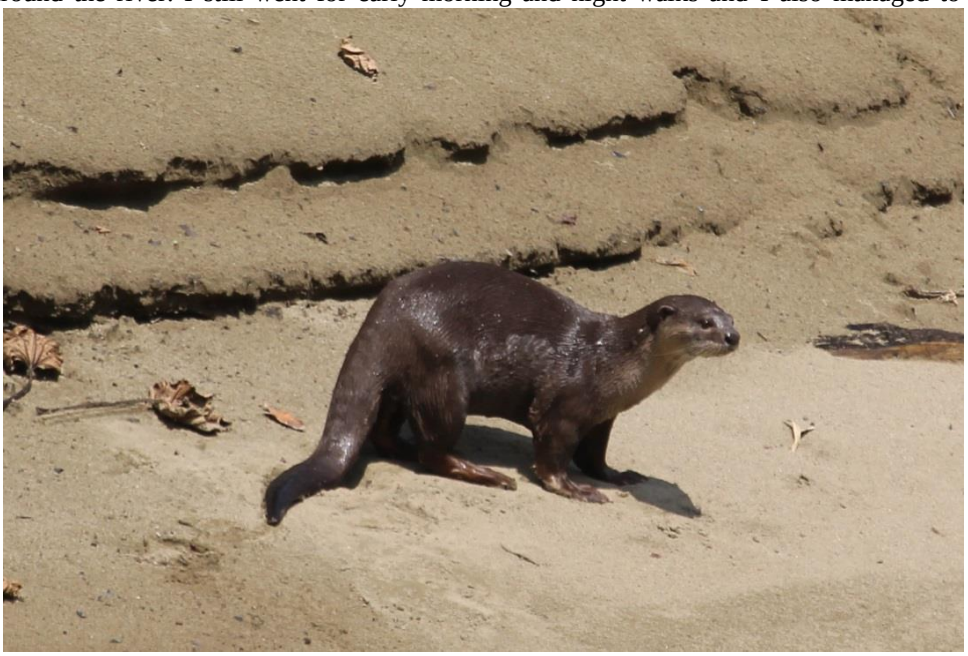
pangolin scales, which weighed a staggering 3,960lbs. I have no real idea how many dead pangolins that equates to, but it is again a horrifying figure and I am aware that, so rare have pangolins become in Asia, many countries in Africa are now being ravaged to supply what amounts to an incessant demand. You have to wonder how the Chinese are going to cope physically when all of these animals are extinct and they have to rely on conventional medicine, or will their wise healers then just say that actually the undigested

matter inside a porcupines stomach was never truly that beneficial and that the properties of domestic animals are far more auspicious? They will have to think of something, as, utterly tragically, at the rate they are currently being annihilated, there will be very few genuinely wild animals remaining within a far shorter timescale than any government is willing to acknowledge. Certainly none of the critically endangered species can survive this century and it is very unlikely that some of the most iconic animals on the planet will even survive the coming decade. Two days before I arrived, one exceptionally lucky couple did observe a pangolin within a few kilometres of the lodge. When I spoke to their guide, he informed me that it was the first pangolin he had seen for over two years. At times the reality of this type of issue can appear overwhelming, but you would never enjoy any wildlife if you constantly considered the global situation and I moved on to Danum Valley Field Centre buoyed by the excellent slow loris and binturong sightings. The field centre is only a short drive from the lodge and also overlooks the Danum River, or at least some of the buildings do, as it is a large complex with many permanent members of staff and living quarters for the Ph.D. students, researchers and scientists working there. The centre has an international reputation as one of the leading tropical forest research stations in the world and features a range of impressive facilities, including several laboratories, an extensive library, computer rooms and a small restaurant. The field centre overlooks the primary forest of the Danum Valley Conservation Area and to the east lies the INFAPRO Rainforest Rehabilitation Project. Founded by Face The Future, an independent international organisation that also manage projects in Africa and South America, INFAPRO has been protecting and rehabilitating 30,000 hectares of rainforest since 1982 and is one of the largest forest restoration projects in the region. Through extensive tree planting and sustainable forest management, a significant area is gradually being restored, creating an expanded migration area for the



wildlife of the adjacent Conservation Area. Whilst it was extremely heartening to learn more about such an important project, and I loved the beautiful setting and relaxed atmosphere of the field centre, my stay there was the least successful of the trip, principally because I visited during the Hari Raya festivities and most of the guides were absent. I had been aware of this before I travelled, but I had been informed that a guide would be available for drives at least and that I could also walk the trails on my own. Unfortunately, this was not actually the case, as you are only allowed to explore the very short trails around the lodge unaccompanied and there were no guides available to either walk or drive, which basically meant that I had four days to search for wildlife on trails that totalled less than a kilometre in length. I obviously had to ignore the rules regarding the longer trails, which were thankfully reasonably well maintained, and spent a great deal of time alone in the forest. Fortuitously, such is the academic nature of the centre, other general visitors are more or less invisible and I was able to do so without restriction. I was also able to arrange a few short drives with a couple of helpful locals, but the longest was two hours and the results were relatively disappointing. Having said that, the real beauty of watching wildlife, is that you never know what will suddenly appear and I had a few gems to break the extended periods spent searching alone. The first was an older male orangutan, walking beside the forest and straight along the main road leading through the field centre. This was the first orangutan I had seen on the ground since Sepilok, although this one was totally wild and is simply very comfortable in the presence of people. At one stage he approached to within a couple of metres of me and was a regular visitor to the centre during my stay. Primates in general were easily observed and one morning I awoke to a small troop of maroon langurs feeding in a tree beside my room. As at almost every destination, both macaque species were also common and one routine lunch was transformed into a memorable occasion by a spectacular display from several gibbons directly in front of the raised dining area. I never tire of watching these powerful and extraordinarily athletic primates and it is difficult to fully comprehend exactly how they allow themselves to plummet such distances at such speed, totally confident that the branch they are leaping to will support them. I had a better perspective of just how astonishing their acrobatics really are, when I climbed the centre's famous, or perhaps infamous, observation tower. The tower basically consists of a ladder straight up the side of a tree, leading to two platforms, the highest of which is 40

metres above the ground. Whilst there is a metal guard around the ladder, it is really only there to make you feel slightly more comfortable and will do very little if you slip. The view from the top, however, is breathtaking and on one of my ascents I had the unusual experience of looking down on another group of maroon langurs, which made a nice change having spent four weeks craning my neck at monkeys towering above me. One of my few drives was to a far more conventional viewing platform, where regular stairs take you to the top to watch the sunrise. You make the initial drive in the dark and on the way we briefly caught a leopard cat in the headlights. There were several guests on this trip and while I prepared my camera equipment, they all made their way to the top. I was just about to do the same, when a cat emerged from the morning darkness and walked within a few metres of me, before disappearing into the forest. My instinctive reaction was that it was a marbled cat, but I could not be entirely sure, as it was not yet light and its markings were difficult to make out in the gloom. Certainly it had a distinctive pattern, which immediately ruled out either flat-headed or bay cats, and it was significantly bigger than a leopard cat, but not large enough to be a clouded leopard or again a bay cat. Its tail was also very long and although I was therefore reasonably confident that I had encountered my third cat species of the trip, more from a process of elimination than the actual sighting, I was happy to see another marbled cat at my final destination, just to make sure. The tower itself presided over a remarkable view of the jungle and the photograph on the second page of this report was taken that morning from the top platform. Despite trying most of the long trails alone, I had very little success on foot over the first two days and walked far less on the final two. The trails were just not productive during the day and after about 25 hours I only had a house shrew and a couple of snakes to show for the not inconsiderable effort in murderous humidity. Night walks were slightly better, with a few civets, sambar deer and a lone bearded pig, but it was difficult to cover much ground and after seeing just one Malay civet on a three-hour walk, I returned to the restaurant area to refill my water and found another Malay civet with its head in the rubbish bin. I could have sat there for the entire evening and been as successful and I therefore decided, as I often do in unfavourable conditions, that over the last two days I would pick a good vantage point and concentrate my efforts around the river. I still went for early morning and night walks and I also managed to arrange a couple of night drives, which produced more civets, several different flying squirrels and another flying lemur, but the rest of the time I simply sat watching the river in the sunshine with a cool drink. Whenever it got too hot, I just jumped in the river for a quick swim and I actually saw a smooth-coated otter whilst still in the water. I quickly learned, simply by observing quietly, that there were in fact two otters and they had a holt within a few minutes of the centre. I gradually moved towards their home and took up a position behind some rocks that overlooked the riverbank from which they would always emerge. The entrance, as is often the case with otters, was concealed by overhanging trees and I only saw them together once and then only briefly, so perhaps they had very young pups. I did not attempt to get too close and in this way was able to spend several wonderful hours watching them over my final two days. Their pattern was often much the same, as they would hunt for maybe fifteen to twenty minutes and then, regardless of whether they had been successful or not, would climb out of the river and spend roughly the same amount of time resting in the sun and rolling on the sandy riverbank. As far as I was aware, neither otter ventured more than 100 metres up or downstream, although it is possible they did so when I had presumed they had



returned to their holt, as I could not see the actual entrance. I thought that I must have missed them depart on one occasion during my final day, as I suddenly saw an otter swimming towards me, followed by another. It was only when I saw a third and then a fourth, that I realised these were in fact different otters and I quickly ran up the bank towards the bridge, in order to get a better view as they swam under. I counted five in all as they passed the bridge and could now see that they were actually Asian small-clawed otters, my first of the trip. I was able to stay with them for several minutes while they hunted in the area just beyond the bridge and I followed along the riverbank. Two left the water at one stage to feed, but as soon as they returned all five disappeared upstream. I was delighted to have seen two different otter species during my vigil on the river and reflected that it was certainly the right decision to abandon the jungle for a couple of days, as I was becoming jaded in the same environment constantly and needed a break before moving on to my final destination, which had the potential to be an absolute disaster. Considering the shocking deforestation that has continued unchecked across much of Borneo, the choice of a logging concession as my final destination may initially appear a strange one. I certainly had my own reservations before travelling and initially intended to visit Deramakot Forest Reserve for only two days, just in case it was awful and I could not wait to leave. However, as I learned more about the reserve, I could see that it clearly had the potential to become an important destination within Sabah, not specifically for wildlife viewing, although I hoped that would be a significant element, but more in terms of conservation, as Deramakot is considered to be one of the finest examples of sustainable forest management in the region. The key would be whether it was actually being managed competently and ethically and I decided to stay for four nights, to give myself sufficient time to make a reasonable assessment. Deramakot is one of several Forest Management Units administered by the Sabah Forestry Department and it is fair to say that historically many of these units have been exploited and mismanaged. Certified by the Forest Stewardship Council, an international organisation dedicated to the promotion of responsible forest management, Deramakot is acknowledged to be the exception and the flagship of the Sabah Forestry Department. Companies and organisations from all over the world visit to study the practices established at Deramakot and these practices are now being replicated in other countries. There are a number of factors that make the model at Deramakot so impressive, not least the fact that the entire area of just over 55,000 hectares comprises secondary forest, as it was severely logged decades ago and only around 20% is considered to be in good condition. No primary forest is therefore being touched, which is one of the principle directives of FSC certification, and the areas in poor condition are being given time to recover. Around 93% of the 55,000 hectares is allocated for timber production, the rest is a protected conservation area, but only selective logging takes place and only around a quarter of the entire reserve can be logged within a ten-year cycle, which means that once a section has been harvested, it will not be touched again for at least 30 years. This 40-year management cycle allows the flora to regenerate and at any given time 75% of the reserve is undisturbed to act as a sanctuary for a great deal of wildlife. There is of course an impact on this wildlife in the areas logged, but selective logging, the process of taking only the best and largest trees from each section of forest, greatly reduces this impact and is preferable to the standard practice of levelling and then replanting huge areas, which basically destroys everything within them. Obviously it would be better if no logging had to take place, but this is unrealistic with such a global demand and it is therefore essential that timber production is strictly controlled and that timber is only purchased from sustainable sources. The key going forward is to actually devote more land to the type of sustainable forest management practiced at Deramakot, as projects such as these will need to produce sufficient timber in order to ensure that the dwindling pristine areas across the globe are now completely protected. You could save the vast majority of

animal species on the planet with just this one act and as long as the new land devoted to timber production is already being used for less profitable commercial purposes, then it is impossible for anyone to lose, excluding of course, those involved in illegal logging. The problem is, although there is certainly a great deal of money to be made from the timber industry, doing it the right way is not as profitable in the short-term, as the initial development and operating costs to produce the type of infrastructure established at Deramakot are relatively high and there are no quick returns on that investment. Sustainable timber production is more a long-term venture, as all logging is strictly controlled by precise annual quotas and even if you harvest the allowed quota within the first three months of the year, you cannot take more until the beginning of the following year. All of the timber is auctioned in order to produce the highest possible price and every single log receives its own serial number, so if you buy an item of furniture in Europe that was made from a tree harvested at Deramakot, it can actually be traced back, not only to the plot that the timber was taken from, but the actual location of the tree. It is an incredibly efficient and professionally administered system and for once doing something in the right manner has a financial advantage, as FSC certified timber sells for 15% to 25% more than other locally produced wood. Whilst it

is impossible to verify every element of this type of project in just a few days, I did check all of these facts with several independent sources, as well as with the FSC, and in all I was tremendously encouraged. My only remaining concerns were whether the wildlife was thriving in this type of environment and how intrusive the logging would be to potential guests, bearing in mind that I was visiting during a period when logging was taking place, which is not the case all year round. I had read promising reports regarding the wildlife before I travelled and I was already aware that previous visitors had seen a Borneo bay cat at Deramakot, which is a great indicator in terms of the condition of the habitat and the range of species it protects. As it is such an important initiative, illegal logging has been totally eradicated and I was also informed that poaching does not really occur, which is difficult to corroborate without extensive research, but certainly the wildlife that I encountered appeared to be undisturbed and in some cases far easier to see than at many of the more renowned reserves I had visited. My only real issue was that my guide, who is the only individual currently accredited to take guests into the reserve, was really a birding guide and was therefore using a standard four-wheel drive. Whilst comfortable and more than fine for the forest roads, which are relatively well maintained in

order to service the logging trucks, an enclosed vehicle makes mammal watching extremely difficult, particularly in terms of photography. There are very few angles that you can take a shot from and of course the moment you exit the vehicle the animal usually disappears. Consequently, although I had a great number of sightings at Deramakot, including all three small cats for the first time at one single destination, I was able to photograph very few of them. Spotlighting was all but impossible in the enclosed vehicle and to salvage the situation I asked my guide, who was very friendly and excellent company, to hire some of the forest employees and their pick-up, which I stood in the back of each night. This was a great improvement, but unfortunately was not an option during the day, as the men were all working and needed their vehicles. Although Deramakot is actually fairly close to Danum Valley, there is no reliable road between the two and I therefore had to drive back towards Lahad Datu and go the long way round, which took several hours. We consequently arrived at Deramakot very late and my intended four-day stay was instantly reduced to just three full days, the final one of which was severely disrupted by bad weather. This was not sufficient at this destination and at some stage I will arrange an extended visit, as I was reasonably successful during my short stay and am confident that I would have seen a great deal more if I had been able to devote longer to the reserve and my visit had been organised more efficiently. I will also bring camera traps next time, as I inadvertently left mine at home on this occasion and they would probably have been highly productive at Deramakot. We made up for some of the lost time on the drive in, when we came across a pair of Malayan porcupines, one of three porcupine species in Sabah and the only ones that I would find throughout the tour, in the middle of the road. I tried to get close on foot to take a quick shot, but the vehicle had already disturbed them and one dashed to the right of the road and the other disappeared to the left. I had quickly realised that the enclosed vehicle was going to be a problem given the limited visibility on jungle roads and sadly this had been demonstrated almost immediately. However, it was still a great start and I was particularly pleased to see one of the species that has been so badly persecuted across much of Asia. Things were to get even better on my first morning, when we were searching the road that leads through the poorest section of forest and down to the Kinabatangan River. Given the ease of access and easy transportation, areas around rivers were always historically the most severely logged and the section around the Kinabatangan was no exception, with sparse cover and almost no trees of any significance. We had not quite reached that heavily degraded area when I spotted something on the very periphery of my vision to my right, I was in the passenger seat on the left, and instantly shouted stop. I knew what it was before I even jumped out of the vehicle, but I would not allow myself to believe it at first, as I had just seen a sun bear climbing down a tall tree. As I rounded the front of the vehicle, I caught a quick glimpse of the bears face, before enduring perhaps the most frustrating few seconds I have experienced whilst searching for wildlife, as the bear climbed down the very back of the tree trunk and only its paws were visible on either side. I did not really know whether to laugh or cry, as I had spotted one of the rarest animals in Borneo and yet all I could do as it shimmied down into the forest, was watch its paws. I was fairly disappointed that my guide had not seen the bear, as it was on his side and it would

have given us a precious few extra seconds if he had seen it. However, it is never easy to spot when you are driving and again I cursed the fact that I was not standing in an open vehicle, as I would have had a perfect angle and could have stopped the vehicle before the bear had been disturbed. So desperate was I for a better view, I initially looked to follow the bear into the forest, but the road was perched on a steep slope and there was no way to get through the dense vegetation and down the hill quickly. Even on top of our vehicle there was no view to the forest floor and we actually lost sight of the bear when it still had about fifteen metres of tree to climb down. While I was delighted to have seen such a magnificent animal, I was also incredibly frustrated that the sighting had been so unsatisfactory and at this point I made a very basic mistake, as you never ignore where you have seen a rare animal, however unlikely it is that they will return to the same spot. The tree was fruiting and the sun bear had almost certainly been feeding, which should have automatically alerted me to the fact that it could, just possibly, return. Perhaps the relative disappointment of such a poor view impaired my judgement, but, whatever the reason, I instead more or less dismissed our chances of seeing the bear again and turned my attention to other animals for the rest of the day. Fortunately, I did not entirely ignore the possibility and when we approached the same area the next morning, I asked my guide to slow down. Within maybe a minute of this request, I saw the bear in the same tree, only this time it was higher. As we stopped the vehicle, the nervous sun bear again began to descend, but this time I was able to approach and had an excellent view of it staring directly down at me. It was a truly thrilling sight and, after the immense frustration of the previous day, I was too engrossed to even consider taking a picture. Thankfully, this time the bear climbed down the side of the tree and I was able to watch it for several seconds before I realised it was going to slip out of view and belatedly took a quick shot. I very rarely use photographs of such poor quality, but I was so delighted to see a wild sun bear, that I decided to include it here, just as a reminder of such a fortuitous and happy event. My mistake had still been costly, for although we had a much clearer view this time, principally because I had asked the guide to slow down, we had again disturbed the bear and I knew that we should have approached on foot, which is what we arranged to do the next morning. To expect the bear to be in the same tree three days in a row was almost too much to hope for and I was still admonishing myself for being so stupid the next morning, when we parked the car and walked almost a kilometre in complete silence, just in case we were about to get astonishingly lucky. At first I thought we had, as I saw a large shape moving in the tree and it took me a few moments to realise that it was actually a big male orangutan emerging from its nest. We were much earlier than the previous two mornings and the plan was to wait quietly and see if the sun bear would appear, although we both knew that the presence of the orangutan may now complicate matters. It is hard to imagine an occasion when you would be

desperately sorry to see an orangutan, but this was one and after about half an hour, the ape began to display very clear signs of agitation. These increased significantly over the next few minutes and eventually the orangutan became so distressed it began swaying branches with its own weight in a desperate attempt to get to another tree. By this stage we could clearly hear something on the forest floor and were fairly certain that the sun bear had indeed returned for a third successive day. We now badly needed the orangutan to depart and allow the bear to climb the tree to feed, but instead the ape went absolutely mad and began breaking large branches and throwing them down towards what we hoped was the bear. As the shrieks and howls of the ape became more raucous, we were given our confirmation, as the bear responded with a distinctive bark and we both knew that our chances of seeing it again had greatly diminished, as sun bears are secretive, fairly timid creatures and we did not think that it was likely to hang around amid so much commotion. If the orangutan had departed then, we may still have been fortunate, but it continued to scream and hurl branches for another fifteen minutes and it was not long before we stopped hearing the exciting rustle of the undergrowth around the tree. Although the ape eventually calmed and moved deeper into the forest, the bear had clearly done the same and it did not return, at least not during the two or so hours that we waited. I was left with mixed emotions, as we had been unbelievably lucky to see the bear two days in a row, but had been denied what would have been one of the great encounters by an incredible display of natural behaviour from another magnificent animal. Whilst it would have been very special to watch the bear climb the tree and feed, it was also a great privilege to observe the ape defend itself against a perceived threat and ultimately I only had myself to blame for the fact that we did not approach on foot the previous day. Such are the vagaries of wildlife watching and on the whole I was elated to have seen such a rare and precious animal so well. We encountered three orangutans in all at Deramakot, as well as several gibbons and both species of macaque, but the only other mammals observed during the day, excluding squirrels and treeshrews, were two elephants and numerous bearded pigs. As was the case at every destination, the nights were far more productive and sightings included four different civets, Malay, common palm, masked palm and small-toothed palm, slow loris, flying lemur, moonrat, both species of chevrotain, sambar deer and a juvenile reticulated python. We saw two leopard cats and a flat-headed cat whilst spotlighting in the pick-up, but sadly the marbled cat was seen in the headlights of my guide's vehicle when we were returning late from an afternoon drive, so again there was no chance of a photograph. I was still delighted, as the only other marbled cat sighting had not been particularly satisfactory and at least on this occasion I had an excellent view of the animal and could clearly identify it. When I mentioned the marbled cat to one of the men helping us spotlight, he informed me that we would try an area that night where he regularly sees this cat sitting in a tree beside the road. He thought that our chances of seeing it were fairly high, but sadly the weather again intervened and, on what was my final night, the incessant rain made spotlighting impossible. As always, it was good to talk to the locals and I was told that banded linsang, banded palm civet, yellow-throated marten, otter civet and sunda stink badger all occur and that if you stayed for a reasonable period, you would have a fair chance of observing at least one or two of these more elusive animals. Clouded leopard are also present and are encountered from time to time and Deramakot is considered to be one of the best locations in Sabah to see banteng, an impressive type of wild cattle. Although I did not see the animal itself, this appeared to be a fairly accurate claim, as I discovered lots of evidence of its presence, including tracks and dung. My guide also informed me that Deramakot is an excellent birding location and on my last day I finally saw a helmeted hornbill, which was the only hornbill species I had not seen of the eight that occur in Borneo. In terms of a wildlife destination, Deramakot still needs some work, as resources and manpower are currently dedicated to the timber production side of the reserve and the wildlife infrastructure certainly needs attention in order to attract guests. At least one open vehicle, preferably with seats, is essential, both for drives during the day and spotlighting at night. Two of course would be better to provide greater flexibility and, as per every wildlife destination, the reserve desperately needs well trained wildlife guides. Not forest workers who split their time between guests and logging, but professional guides who know the reserve well and the species that occur there. There needs to be at least one good walking trail at the main camp, apparently there is a trail, but it has not been maintained, and there should also be access to the salt licks that I was informed of, but was not able to visit. New chalets are being built, but the current accommodation is fine, if not spectacular, and all of

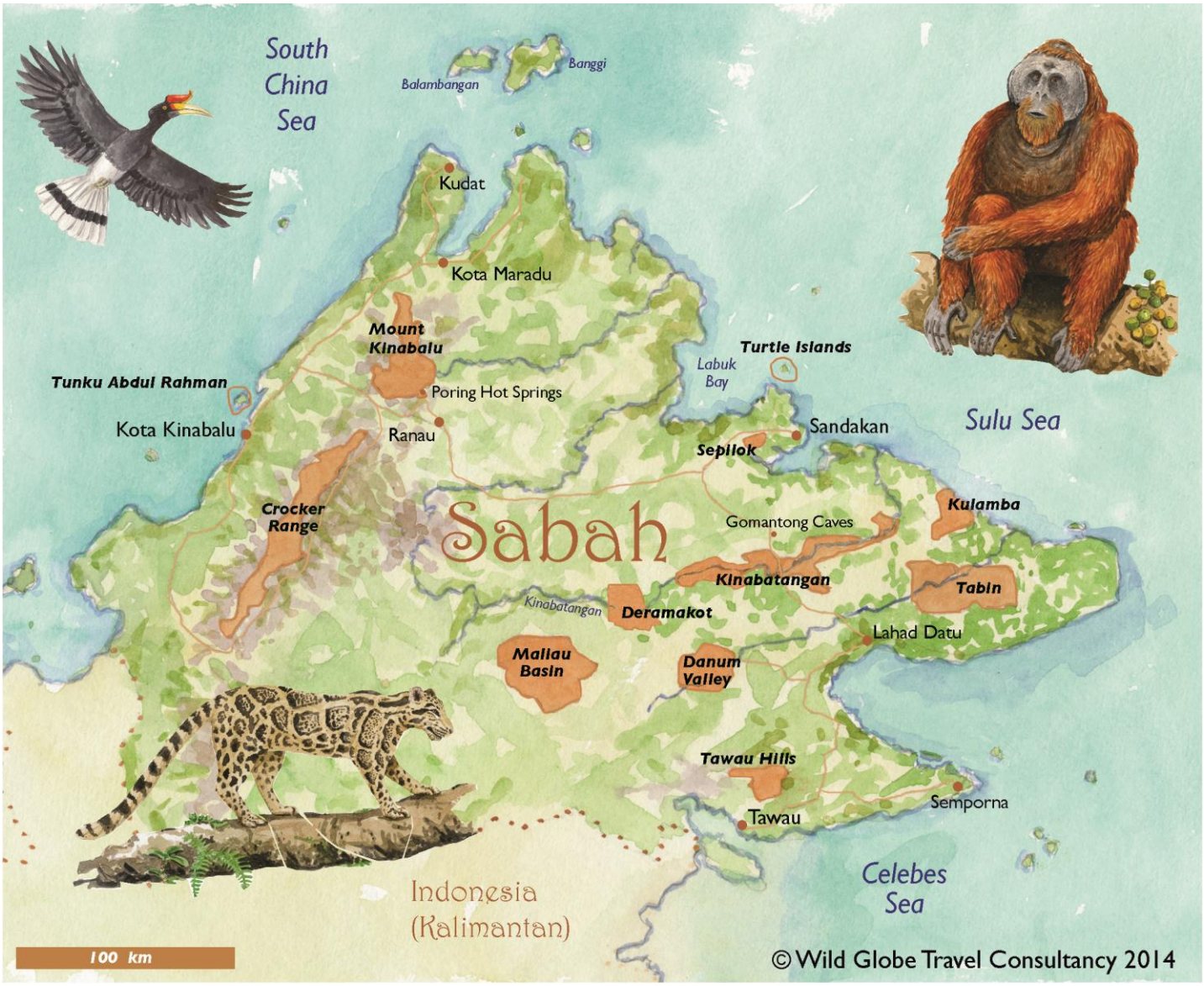
the staff are extremely friendly, including the local who does the cooking and was delighted to introduce me to his two children. In terms of the logging, whilst it is always slightly uncomfortable to drive past piles of dead trees at the various collection points, the logging is not really intrusive, as you do not enter the areas being harvested and there is a reasonably large network of roads to choose from. Certainly Deramakot has immense potential, particularly if visitors are interested in the conservation work taking place here, and it would not take a great deal of organisation or effort to transform the reserve into a genuine wildlife destination. There is much that could be done at relatively low cost and it would not take long for the wildlife side of the enterprise to become profitable, not when you consider the prices that other lodges currently charge and the limited number of species you are likely to see at them. As it was, my first visit to Deramakot ended as successfully as it began, when a short-tailed mongoose ran across the road that I was taking back to Kota Kinabalu. After 32 days of impenetrable jungle, sweltering humidity and biblical rain, I had a long overdue appointment with a very cool and very blue swimming pool. The mongoose was the ninth carnivore observed at Deramakot, the most seen at any single destination, which was fairly remarkable in only three full days, particularly considering that I encountered just fourteen during the whole trip. It was also the 52nd mammal that I had been able to positively identify on what was a long and at times demanding tour. Although a total of 52 mammals is impressive enough, and would have been closer to a hundred if I had included a large number of bat species and the many shrews, squirrels and other rodents that I was not able to identify, seventeen of the final tally were rodents and there were several major species that I would have been delighted to find. I was fairly successful in terms of observing six of the eight civet species, only the extremely rare hose's palm civet and the Sunda otter civet eluded me, but was less fortunate with some of the other small carnivores that it is usually possible to encounter in the areas that I visited. Banded linsang, collared mongoose, hairy-nosed otter, yellow-throated marten and Sunda stink badger were all major absentees and I also spent a long time searching in vain for banteng, as well as both muntjac species. Given the severe poaching situation, it is perhaps not surprising that I also had no success with the two other porcupine species, thick-spined and long-tailed, or the Sunda pangolin, although I was greatly heartened to learn that another party did find a pangolin during my stay at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge. Certainly the pending Sumatran rhinoceros enclosure at Tabin will be the only possible way to see this persecuted creature in Sabah at least and for now the dream of watching a Borneo bay cat remains just that, a distant dream. As more attention is devoted to the animal, this may well change over the coming years, as even ten years ago the thought of searching specifically for a jaguar or a snow leopard would have been considered absurd and now both animals can be observed almost routinely. With regards to clouded leopard and sun bear, you could visit Sabah ten times and never see them, but equally you could stumble upon either on your first drive through the jungle. Going forward I will devote time to finding more reliable destinations for both animals, Deramakot may be one of these, but much will depend on the level of protection they each receive and whether their dwindling numbers stabilise or even increase. While the amazing sun bear sightings ensured that my trip was a moderate success, I spent very long days in the field and calculated that I probably searched exclusively for wildlife for upwards of 570 hours, which equates to about sixteen hours per mammal if you exclude the rodents and about 25 hours if you then also exclude the mammals that are encountered without really having to search. This is of course far too long for the majority of tourists, particularly those used to seeing a high number of animals easily in other countries, and I left Sabah knowing that while much of the wildlife had somehow endured and that it certainly remained possible to run interesting trips there, they would probably have to be general wildlife tours, incorporating the few high profile animals that are commonly encountered as well as any rare creatures that you might be fortunate enough to chance upon. The majority of tourists do not have almost five weeks to spare for a single trip and only hardcore wildlife enthusiasts are going to be prepared to devote the number of hours per day, in extremely testing conditions, to the task of looking for the more elusive animals in the most difficult of all habitats. In terms of photography, the trip was one of the most challenging I have ever experienced, as the combination

of dense, dark jungle, freak weather conditions and generally swift, timid animals, culminated in a large number of very poor quality photographs. Even the animals that are relatively easy to see, principally the primates, are difficult to photograph, as they are usually perched high in the thick forest canopy and at considerable distance. I did manage to take some sort of shot of every major mammal excluding the porcupines, mongooses and one confirmed marbled cat, all of which appeared briefly on the road whilst I was within an enclosed vehicle, but the vast majority of my pictures were truly awful and photography can become almost impossible when your visibility does not extend beyond the road on which you are driving. At several destinations I gave up attempting to photograph any animals that dashed across my path and instead tried to identify them and just enjoy each individual sighting. As with so many wildlife destinations across the globe, I ultimately departed Borneo with mixed feelings, knowing that while there remained the potential to produce a fascinating tour that could actually be aimed at helping to conserve several threatened species, visitors would no longer be able to enjoy the full majesty of an island that once beguiled the world.

No.	Species	Scientific Name	Notes
1	Marbled Cat	Pardofelis marmorata	One at Deramakot and almost certainly another at Danum Valley Field Centre.
2	Flat-headed Cat	Prionailurus planiceps	Two in the Kinabatangan River area and one at Deramakot.
3	Leopard Cat	Prionailurus bengalensis	First seen in the Kinabatangan River area and at least 30 sightings across every subsequent destination.

4	Sun Bear	Helarctos malayanus	One bear twice at Deramakot.
5	Smooth-coated Otter	Lutrogale perspicillata	Eight at Tabin and two at the Danum Valley Field Centre.
6	Asian Small-clawed Otter	Aonyx cinerea	Group of five at the Danum Valley Field Centre.
7	Malay Weasel	Mustela nudipes	One at a palm oil plantation past Tabin.
8	Malay Civet	Viverra tangalunga	Over twenty at almost every location.
9	Binturong	Arctictis binturong	Two at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge, the first for the entire day.
10	Common Palm Civet	Paradoxurus hermaphroditus	Common at night at most locations.
11	Masked Palm Civet	Paguma larvata	Seen at Tabin, Borneo Rainforest Lodge and Deramakot.
12	Small-toothed Palm Civet	Arctogalidia trivirgata	One at Tabin and a second at Deramakot.
13	Banded Palm Civet	Hemigalus derbyanus	One spotlighting in the Sepilok Forest.
14	Short-tailed Mongoose	Herpestes brachyurus	One approaching the Gomantong Caves and one running across the road at Deramakot.
15	Sambar Deer	Rusa unicolor	Common around Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley Field Centre and Deramakot.
16	Lesser Oriental Chevrotain	Tragulus kanchil	Seen at every lowlands destination.
17	Greater Oriental Chevrotain	Tragulus napu	Low numbers at Borneo Rainforest Lodge and Deramakot.
18	Bearded Pig	Sus barbatus	Common and viewed at almost every location.
19	Asian Elephant	Elephas maximus	Small herd in the Kinabatangan River area, observed each day at Tabin and two animals at Deramakot.
20	Bornean Orangutan	Pongo pygmaeus	Over thirty across every location after Kinabalu and excluding Sepilok.
21	Bornean Gibbon	Hylobates muelleri	Viewed at every location after Sepilok.
22	Maroon Langur	Presbytis rubicunda	Low numbers on the forest road to the Gomantong Caves and at both the Borneo Rainforest Lodge and Danum Valley Field Centre.
23	Hose's Langur	Presbytis hosei	Lone individual at Tabin.
24	Silvered Langur	Trachypithecus cristatus	First seen in the Kinabatangan River area and infrequent sightings at most subsequent destinations.
25	Proboscis Monkey	Nasalis larvatus	Large numbers at the Labuk Bay sanctuary and on the Kinabatangan River.
26	Long-tailed Macaque	Macaca fascicularis	Common at every lowlands destination.
27	Southern Pig-tailed Macaque	Macaca nemestrina	Large numbers at every lowlands destination.
28	Bornean Slow Loris	Nycticebus menagensis	Two at Borneo Rainforest Lodge and one at Deramakot.
29	Western Tarsier	Tarsius bancanus	One in the Kinabatangan River area and one at Tabin.
30	Sunda Flying Lemur	Galeopterus variegatus	One each at Kinabatangan, Tabin, Borneo Rainforest Lodge and Deramakot.
31	Moonrat	Echinosorex gymnura	One each at Tabin, Borneo Rainforest Lodge and Deramakot.
32	House Shrew	Suncus murinus	One on a trail at the Danum Valley Field Centre.
33	Striped Treeshrew	Tupaia dorsalis	Several at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge and at subsequent destinations.
34	Painted Treeshrew	Tupaia picta	Three at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge.
35	Malayan Porcupine	Hystrix brachyura	A pair on the road into Deramakot.
36	Pale Giant Squirrel	Ratufa affinis	One solitary animal at the Rainforest Discovery Centre.
37	Kinabalu Squirrel	Callosciurus baluensis	Two at Kinabalu Park.
38	Prevost's Squirrel	Callosciurus prevostii	Observed at every destination after Kinabalu Park.
39	Borneo Black-banded Squirrel	Callosciurus orestes	First observed at Kinabalu Park.
40	Plaintain Squirrel	Callosciurus notatus	Large numbers at Sepilok.
41	Low's Squirrel	Sundasciurus lowii	First observed at Sepilok.
42	Jentink's Squirrel	Sundasciurus jentinki	First observed at Kinabalu Park.

43	Bornean Mountain Ground Squirrel	Dremomys everetti	First observed at Kinabalu Park.
44	Tufted Pygmy Squirrel	Exilisciurus whiteheadi	First observed at Kinabalu Park.
45	Least Pygmy Squirrel	Exilisciurus exilis	First observed in the Kinabatangan River area.
46	Sculptor Squirrel	Glyphotes simus	First observed at Kinabalu Park.
47	Common Giant Flying Squirrel	Petaurista petaurista	Common at almost every location at night.
48	Thomas's Flying Squirrel	Aeromys thomasi	Viewed at several locations.
49	Black Flying Squirrel	Aeromys tephromelas	First observed at the Rainforest Discovery Centre.
50	Brown Rat	Rattus norvegicus	Common at several locations.
51	Malaysian Field Rat	Rattus tiomanicus	First observed at Tabin.
52	Red Spiny Rat	Maxomys surifer	One on the road at Deramakot.



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