

The World was all before them, where to choose
Thir place of rest, and Providence thir guide:
They hand in hand with wandring steps and slow,
Through *Eden* took thir solitarie way.

— The closing lines of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, which I find relevant to our lives.

Thursday, July 26, 2012, SFO to HKG (It became Friday during the flight)

When I tried to print boarding passes for our flight to Hong Kong and on to Kota Kinabalu, I learned for the first time that Typhoon Vicente had passed thru the area a few days ago. The CEO of Cathay Pacific Airlines had a posting on the web page urging everyone to delay non-essential travel. The news programs, however, showed Hong Kong cleaning up and returning to normal.

I dithered as the day wore on, checking the web site repeatedly. Both flights we have checked in on indicate departure on time. We both get our hair cut short, the last item on our list before leaving. We pack in two rollaboards with our day packs as our "personal item." The suitcases are too heavy — the limits are ridiculously low, 7 kilos in Economy — but the size is within the limits. Then, we rest, eat a bit until Charles arrives to take us to SFO. (Kudos to Charles, who even offered to pick us up, something I hope he reconsiders as we are scheduled to arrive in SFO during the afternoon rush hour.)

So we are now in the air on our way to Hong Kong. The schedule showed us leaving late (2:00 am) but arriving earlier than planned, at 5:30. This opens up the possibility that we might be able to switch to an earlier flight to Kota Kinabalu, which would probably be an improvement, but would mess up plans for our transfer to the hotel on arrival.

We won't be able to evaluate the situation until we get to HK, and that is still several hours away. The ½ of an Ambien that I took didn't work to keep me asleep for long. Linda though it totally zonked out. I was drowsing during the end of *Hunger Games*, one of the two movies I thought sounded interesting. I rated it *** ½, very faithful to the book, with Donald Sutherland as a scary President Snow. He was the only actor that I recognized. Now, I am awake, when I need to be sleeping. So it goes.

We've made it to Hong Kong, at least the airport. We have recently compiled a lists of places we have been without leaving the airport. Now, HKG is another on the list. No birds yet.

We have a long layover here, and have set ourselves up in the "Travelers Lounge," an innovative approach to airport lounges that simply charges you for the privilege of having plugs to recharge everything, somewhat more comfortable seats, and some free food. It was not easy to find, but is still crowded, a holdover from the typhoon. It is raining heavily outside, and we have congratulated ourselves on lack of a plan for sightseeing, birding, etc. Looks like a good day to sit around and read, blog, whatever.

The flight to Kota Kinabalu was uneventful, and our local contact was waiting for us. We had to wait for three other members of our group, Paul, Beth, and Ben Loehnen, to claim their baggage. Everyone comments on how we managed to fit everything into two rollaboards. Our hotel was a short drive away. We collapsed into bed at 8:30pm local time, about 30 hours from the time we left 5820 Balmoral Drive.

Saturday, July 28, 2012: Drive to Kinabalu Park.

Our Group:

- Linda and Me
- Dodge and Lorna Engleman, friends from San Antonio that we first met on a birding trip to Papua New Guinea.
- The Loehnens, Paul and Beth from Montana, and Ben, their son, who had a goal to see 3000 species of birds before he was 35. He succeeded on this trip, with 5 months to spare.
- Jim Martin, who would be the other Jim if I hadn't already laid claim to that. This is his second time taking this tour. He broke his last time, which hobbled him somewhat. After I learned that, I watched Linda even more carefully than usual.
- Chris Kehoe, our guide. He has been to Borneo many times.
- Andrew (he has a last name, but no one ever used it), our Bornean guide. He was with us the entire time, supplemented by local guides at most places.

I woke up at 5:30 unable to sleep any longer. For a change, I woke Linda moving around instead of the other way around. We found the Loehnens, the trio who came on the same plane from Hong Kong, as well as Chris Kehoe, our guide, in the dining room when we got there. After a sumptuous breakfast, we spent some time birding around the hotel, managing to pick up three lifers in the process. Then we headed back to the airport to pick up the final member of our group, Jim Martin.

We spent about 30 minutes at a beach down the road a bit in case any good shorebirds were there. We saw a few, but no lifers. Then, we drove to Kinabalu Park, which took about two hours or so. The bus was really laboring getting up the hill, but we made it in time to walk from the headquarters to our room for the next four nights. We are in a chalet of sorts, with two bedrooms upstairs and a living room down. We are sharing it with Jim M and Chris.

We had a nice meal at a nearby restaurant before Linda hit the wall. I entered the birds we saw today while she fell into bed. Tomorrow we have our first *dictionary day* of the trip, where *birding* comes before *breakfast*. The plan is to set off at 5:45 in time to get up the mountain before sunrise. Then we will bird for a couple of hours and go the brekkie. Time to break out the alarm clock.

Sunday, July 29, 2012: Kinabalu Park



Got on the bus (see photo) in time for the 5:45 departure. Linda and I were the last to arrive. Drove to the end of the road, at the Power Station. This is also the gate marking the start of the Kinabalu Summit Trail, 8.6km to the top. Tomorrow, we will go about 2km up the trail in search of some special birds found nowhere else. Today, we spent two hours hanging around the power station, birding from the road. The lights at the power station stay on all the time, and the birds feed on the insects attracted to the lights. After we had tallied all the birds in the area, including a difficult to find Sunda Laughing Thrush spotted by Lorna, we adjourned for breakfast.

The breakfast was a buffet with a fabulous variety of Asian dishes to choose from. We all ate too much, but then worked most of it off hiking along a trail in the forest. Even though we drove to the top of the trail and walked down to a lower part of the road, it was still tiring. The trail was rocky and muddy in spots, and I spent a lot of the time worrying about Linda falling. We didn't see many birds along the trail due to the weather — overcast and very windy — but did manage to get excellent views of the Bornean Stubtail, an endemic, and Linda's New Favorite Bird®. The bird has such a high-pitched call that we couldn't hear it, even though we could see it opening its mouth. We were only about 10 feet away.

We took the bus to the start of another trail, and spent the rest of the morning hiking along it. The birding was the same as on the other trail: spotty, but with some hard-to-find birds available.

We really missed having Terry Cloudman along to photograph the birds. No one of our group is a serious bird photographer. Indeed, everyone with the possible exception of Beth Loehnen, who claims to be along for the ride, is a serious birder. Beth, despite her claim knows how many species are on her life list, so her statement is probably an exaggeration.

The Leohmen son, Ben, has the best eyes of anyone in the group. Several times, he has spotted the bird we are all looking for. His competition is Lorna, who excels in being in the right spot at the right time.



The end of the trail put us at the restaurant for lunch. This was excellent, which means that the trip will not be an occasion for losing weight.

After lunch, we had an hour for rest before setting out again. We walked up the road to yet another trail, one that paralleled the road and put us back where we had started.

When the birding proved to be slow again, Dodge showed us some interesting beetles. Here is a photo of a Longhorn Beetle.

Monday July 30, 2012 Kinabalu Park

We for a certainty are not the first
Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled
Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed
Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.
— A. E. Housman

During the night, it rained heavily several times, and we woke to find the wind howling, tossing our plans for the day into the proverbial cocked hat. We abandoned any thought of hiking along the Summit Trail: the wind would be even higher along the trail so the Friendly Bush Warbler was unlikely to be found. We reluctantly crossed him off our hoped for list. His total habitat is confined to the upper reaches of Mt. Kinabalu and some neighboring peaks.

Instead, we walked around the area of the Power Station again, then walked down the road, birding as we went along. There was no escaping the weather. We tried hiking along some forest trails, but found virtually nothing there.

After lunch, we drove out of the park to a different area, Mesilau, another way to get to the summit. We didn't plan to hike the trail, but the additional 200m of elevation meant that we had a chance for some species not found in the main section of the park. This was a partial success: I managed get a look at the Black-sided Flowerpecker, a bird that had eluded me several times, but not Linda. Then Linda spotted a Pale-headed Bulbul, one of the birds we had made the trip for. On the whole, though, there wasn't much to show for the time we spent getting there.

There was one benefit for the trip: we got to see the *real* Borneo. Everywhere else we have been has been dominated by foreign tourists, including us. There are many different nationalities represented in Kinabalu Park, most of them planning to climb to the Summit. In contrast, our route to Mesilau took us thru agricultural areas with houses more appropriate to the Third World. Then, we drove past a large golf course, with no golfers in sight. (Maybe it was closed on Monday, like the courses in the US.) At the top of the hill, we saw two luxurious houses, one of which had some exquisite art visible from the street. Then we went into a resort that was within the park. This was not as busy as the places in the main part of the Park, but still had at least one party of returning climbers who were preparing a celebratory evening.

After about an hour, we drove back to our chalets, and spent some time hiking the Silau Silau trail yet again. This trail parallels the main road, following a small stream. During normal weather, it probably holds a lot of wildlife, but today, much of it had gone to ground.



During the walk, we had an illustration of what it is like birding with a group of experienced birders. We were hiking single file along the stream. I was near the back of the line when I saw some movement in the bushes. I said a single word, “Wait.” Ben, who was just ahead of me saw where I was looking and said, “Mountain Wren-babbler.” Five minutes later, everyone was congratulating me on locating this difficult bird. Not one person asked, “Where?” or said much of anything. Everyone knew that it was a shy and skittish bird. We all had excellent looks at it.

During one of the walks along the trail — we traversed it many times — we saw a Slender-tailed Tree Shrew, one of the easier Tree Shrews to identify. So far, we have seen four mammals, three squirrels and the tree shrew.

Back at our chalet, we found a number of moths that had taken shelter on door. We took several photos. (Bugs are easier than birds sometimes.) The interesting are shown here: one that looks like a leaf, and another that



the front two most mimics

the wind wandered

Tuesday, July 31, 2012: KNP to Poring

Today, the weather was even worse than yesterday. At the Power Station, was howling at near gale force. Low clouds obscured everything. We around the area for about an hour, snapping pictures of “the mountain” for comparison with those we took yesterday. Then we went for breakfast. meal, we returned to the top of the road and walked all the way back to our taking a couple of hours in the process. We did get excellent looks at Whitehead’s Spiderhunter, one of “Whitehead’s Trio,” and a very difficult bird. Jim Martin, who spotted it, was delighted to have the final member of the trio. He had previously seen Whitehead’s Trogan and Broadbill.

After our chalets,

After lunch, we drove to Poring, stopping along the way at Zen Garden Resort near K*****. I thought it was a cement factory, not a resort. We were there to see the Pygmy White-eye, now renamed Pygmy Ibon. Andrew, our local guide, found it after about 15 minutes of walking around.

At Poring, we walked around the football field, seeing a new mammal: Prevost’s Squirrel, and a few new birds. Linda and I slipped into the hot springs baths after they were officially closed before dinner.



During our walk down the mountain KNP, I noticed a spiderling hanging in ari, “ballooning” by spinning a length silk and letting the wind carry it away. While we were trying to get a good photo, another wound up attached to Linda’s hat. We got a nice photo of one sitting on Linda’s thumb. A short



in the of

that while

later, we saw a small skink on the road. After photographing it, we coaxed it into the grass at the side of the road.

Wednesday, August 1, 2012: Poring: Death March

Today, we had what the brochure describes as a *moderate* hike to a spot where we had a chance to see Hose's Broadbill. The actual hike gives new meaning to the word *moderate*. We began by climbing a series of steps and switchbacks to reach the ridge. Chris, our guide, told us repeatedly, "Just a bit more, then it levels out." It never did level out.



This Chameleon, or maybe just a lizard, was one of the few good pictures we got on the trip. We took this thru Lorna's scope and cropped it to get rid of the vignetting. An even more spectacular, but alas unphotographed, lizard was a pair of *Flying Lizards* that I spotted when one landed on the tree in front of me.

As we slogged ever upward, we got lucky and ran into another group of birders on the way down. They reported that the intended area was very quiet, with no Hose's Broadbill to be found. That saved us about 2km of walking.

Lorna spotted some birds visiting a fruiting tree, and we settled down to watch the tree. Several different birds showed up to feed on the fruit as we ate our box lunches. Linda snapped this photo from behind when we weren't watching. That's me with the thinning gray hair waiting for more action.



After a shower and rest, we felt well enough to sit by a more convenient fruiting tree, one near the restaurant where we were going to eat. This produced a bevy of pretty avifauna at a much lower cost to our bodies.

Thursday, August 2, 2012: Poring, KNP, Rice Paddies, on to KK



We began the day as we had ended it, sitting by the fruiting tree while waiting for the restaurant to open. Then, at 7:00 we moved into the breakfast area. This dragonfly, some species of setwing, perched on a wire right outside long enough for me to get a good picture with Linda's new camera. I was frankly surprised as how crisp a picture I was able to get. So far, the camera is one of our best pieces of equipment for the trip.

Everyone is amazed that we managed to cram everything we needed into carry-on bags. We may have to give a packing demo before the trip is over.

After breakfast, we returned to Kinabalu Park for yet another try for Whitehead's Trogon and Broadbill. This attempt proved as futile as the others, but at least the mountain came out, albeit briefly. It is really impressive when you can see it.

After lunch, we headed for Kota Kinabalu, where will spend one night. Tomorrow, we head to the Rafflesia Preserve before flying to the Crocker Range. On the way to KK, we stopped for an hour to check out some rice paddies. Only one bird there was new for us, Cinnamon Bittern, but it padded the list to a more respectable level.

Friday, August 3, 2012: Rafflesia Centre, Fly to Sandakan

Arose at the ungodly hour of 3:30 am in time to pack and board the bus by 4:00. We drove thru dark streets onto a highway frequented by large trucks (or maybe lorries) to the Rafflesia Information Centre. Rafflesia, in case you are unfamiliar with Bornean plant life, is the largest flower in the world. When we learned that there was a steep trail down to

where the plants actually grow, we groaned (silently!) until we were told that we had no intention of making the trek. In fact, when we investigated, we saw that the gate was locked.

Instead, we ate a box breakfast that had the virtue of being much smaller than the typical one we have indulged in, and then set off to bird along the highway. We spent the morning dodging the traffic and searching the forest along the road for Bornean specialties. We found several endemics, such as the Bornean Bulbul, one of the better looking of the plethora of Bulbul species in Borneo. We also had good looks at the Pygmy Ibol, though not as good as the one yesterday at the ~~cement factory~~ Zen Garden Resort. A pair of amorous Blyth's Hawk-eagles flew over twice in a nuptial display, but flew off out of sight for consummation.

Around noon, we returned to the Centre for a box lunch before driving back to KK airport for a short flight to Sandakan on the Crocker Range. This will provide another chance for some montane and sub-montane species that we are still looking for.

It turned out that the wait for the flight to leave was longer than the trip itself. The airport monitor showed "Boarding" for over an hour as we watched men moving around the plane. We were unable to figure out what the problem was. The pilot referred to some vague "technical problems." From the air we were able to look down on the surprising city of KK, which seems to be in the midst of a major building boom. It is a very modern looking city, quite unlike most of the third world places we have visited. During WWII, the city was bombed extensively, so everything dates from the late 20th century.

We also had our best look yet at the mountain, alas from the other side of the aircraft. Its huge granite bulk was crowned with the slightest hint of a cloud.

The paper has news of a major typhoon hitting Taiwan, so that may have been the source of our weather this week. We have little access to news, and what we do get is mostly about the Olympics. Badminton is a major sport in Malaysia, and the coverage is extensive. The way it is played bears little resemblance to what I indulged in at Rice intramurals.



We have no photos to show for today, so I have included a group shot taken some days ago at the Timpohon Gate by the Power Station in KNP.

From Left to Right, we have Paul Loehnen, young, sharp-eyed Ben Loehnen, Jim Martin, Jim, Linda, Dodge and Lorna Engleman, Beth Loehnen, and Andrew, our Borneo guide. Chris, our Birdquest guide, too the photo.

**Saturday, August 4,
2012:
Sepilok Lodge,
Rainforest Discovery
Centre, Gomantong
Cave, etc.**

Got up at our usual hour of 4:45 in

time to do a preliminary pack before meeting the bus at 5:30. We have a much more impressive bus for this portion of the trip, large enough so that everyone has several choices of where to sit, good A/C, and even a TV to play DVDs if we get bored. Mostly, we use the bus trips for sleeping.



We didn't have much time to sleep this morning as the trip to the Rainforest Discovery Centre took only about 10 minutes. The main attraction of the RDC is a canopy walkway that rates as one of the best built in the world. Steady, with concrete and steel bracing, open mesh flooring to let the rain thru, and as high as a six-story building. Despite that, we were not above the tallest trees, *emergent* to use the term we learned. Some of those are 70-80 m tall, towering above the rest of the forest. This photo, taken from the walkway, gives you some idea of the territory.

Naturally, many of the birds dwell in the canopy, such as the leafy part of the tall tree in the photo. It makes for some tough viewing. A scope helps. Fortunately, some of the best birds of the morning, as well as a great mammal, Giant Squirrel, preferred the shorter trees that were eye level from the walkway. My personal favorite was the Black-and-yellow Broadbill, which preserves my assessment of Broadbills as one of the prettiest families of birds. A stunning bird that sang, showed itself, and did a wing-shuffling display dance (to no avail as far as attracting a mate, alas). It moved onto my short list for Bird of the Trip.

We are in the lowlands now, and it is considerably warmer than the mountains we have been so far. By the time we broke for breakfast at 9:00, I was drenched. However, after a quick meal we set off again for another two hours of birding before returning to our room for a quick cleanup, final packing, and lunch before setting off again.

Breakfast in Borneo, as well as most other meals, is quite a treat. We had a buffet for all meals at the Sepilok Nature Resort, a setup that appeals to all of us. This morning, I had a noodle dish that is becoming my preferred start to the day. It's made with wide rice noodles covered with a pleasantly spicy sauce and mixed with local vegetables that look like baby bok choy. In addition to that, I had some McDonald's-style hash brown potatoes, juice, coffee and some meat that looked like bacon but wasn't. Malaysia is officially Muslim, though Sabah is mostly Christian. Nevertheless, pork is nowhere in sight.

Lorna had the great idea of topping the noodle dish with a fried egg, which I may try given the chance.

The grounds here have many beautiful flowers, both wild and "helped out." In the latter category are the many orchids in boxes that line the railings of the boardwalks to our rooms. I've include a picture



of my favorite. I don't know the name of this orchid.

We also noticed a lovely red dragonfly, and Linda finally managed to get a decent photo. It reminds me somewhat of the Forest Ranger we photographed in Thailand, solid red with mostly opaque red wings. Here's a picture of it.

Gomantong Caves, where three the Edible Nest Swiftlet, the source of the main ingredient of Bird's Nest Soup. That swiftlet and two others are indistinguishable except for the nests. The Edible Nest is white, composed entirely of saliva. An alternate name for the bird is White Nest Swiftlet. Another species mixes its black feathers with the saliva to make its nest, so they are called,

you guessed it, Black Nest Swift. The third species, Mossy Nest Swiftlet, uses moss in the nest. After the birds finish nesting the nests are harvested for the Chinese market. White nests are valuable, black ones less so, and mossy ones bring up the rear. We saw all three nests occupied by Swiftlets, so added three birds to our list in one stop.

We were told that an exorbitant fee of 30 Ringit, about \$10, was charged to take a camera into the cave area, so we found ourselves with the required equipment when we saw the highlight of the trip so far: a wild mother Orang-utan and her infant. She was calmly stripping leaves from a tree near the cave opening while the baby clung to her fur. Then he tried out hanging on a vine, showing us everything, including evidence of his gender.

As further evidence of our folly, we had a 5-star view of a Plain Pygmy Squirrel, the smallest squirrel in the world, about the size of a mouse. We'll know better than to leave the camera on the bus again.

The cave is also home to an estimated 2 million bats. We stayed in the area waiting for the bats to emerge, an event considerably less impressive to people who have seen the equivalent at Bracken Cave in Texas. However, we saw two Peregrine Falcons and four Bat Hawks waiting for their meal and stayed around long enough to watch them hunt. The Peregrines snagged supper fairly quickly, but we never saw the make a kill, despite their name.

Bat Hawks

While we were in the area, we found Rhinoceros Hornbills, one birds I most wanted to see. We were able to get decent photographs, especially by digiscoping, putting Linda's new to the scope eyepiece and taking a picture. Terry Cloudman have gotten something better, but the one I've included is not



of the camera up would bad.

We ended the day by driving to a boat dock on the Kinabatangan where a short boat ride took us to the Bilit River Lodge, our the next few days. When I finally got around to updating the records, I discovered that I had logged my 100th lifer for the trip.

River, home for computer

Sunday, August 5, 2012: Bilit River Lodge

Arising as is our wont before sunrise, we had some toast and tea (coffee is uniformly awful in Borneo) before setting off down the river. We started seeing monkeys, including a troop of Proboscis Monkeys, as well as birds on the banks of the river. The animals come to the banks during the night when it is cooler than the interior forest, then moving back into the forest during the day. So, we were there at just the right time for everything.



In addition to the monkeys and several new bird species, we spotted a large monitor lizard on the shore. One highlight of the morning was Ben, our young companion with spectacular eyesight, notching his 3000th species, a Blue-eared Kingfisher. For once, I had the camera ready and captured a nice photo of this lovely bird, which is about the size of a sparrow.

We returned to the Lodge a little after 9:00 for breakfast. Then we walked around the grounds until about 11:00 when we returned to our room. There, I had two surprises: first, I found that I had a Wi-Fi signal at the room, meaning that I could send out an update; second, I found that the power was out in our room, with a long lead time for a fix. Our nice air-conditioned room retained some cool air from earlier, but it dissipated quickly. The dining room, together with the Wi-Fi connection, have their own generator, so fortunately we can eat and send email. However, it's as hot as Houston right now as I type this sitting on our porch. We are scheduled to go upriver at 3:00 pm, which should help some.



The trip upriver was mostly a long, boring slog, but the ending made it worthwhile. First, we saw two Buffy Fish-owls, probably siblings as they seemed to be newly fledged. One, not that pictured here, was in bad shape and didn't look as if it would survive much longer. While we watched the owls, a pair of White-crested Hornbills flew over and posed for us. This was on Linda's most wanted list. We captured a photo of one of them in a tree. I wasn't pleased with the result, but Linda wanted it in anyway.



Monday August 7, 2012: Back to the Cave, Downriver again. Lots of Nice Mammals

We began the day even earlier than usual, grabbing breakfast at 4:00 so we could leave at 4:30. Our goal was to return to Gomantong Cave before sunrise to have a chance to see the Sunda Frogmouth. We walked along the boardwalk in the dark to reach the spot where the bird was supposed to hang out. Alas, it was nowhere to be found. However, as we were walking, we heard a trickle of water far from the creek, which wasn't trickling in any event. The sound turned out to be from a female



Orang, probably the same one we had seen previously. She was urinating prior to leaving the nest she had slept in. She has a large bladder. Alas, it was too dark for a photo. We saw yet another Orang in the afternoon on the shore of the river and failed again to get a photo. We will probably have a chance at the rehab center we plan to visit on our last day.

Linda snapped the picture at right. The insect is called a "lantern bug." At night it lights up the tip of its proboscis at night and flies around. We saw this one on an exposed building girder.

We saw three Helmeted Hornbills from the road leading to the cave parking lot, thus completing the list of all the Hornbills in Borneo. We were lucky to see these birds with extra long tails flying overhead and perched. We also saw this beautiful butterfly on the road.

Back at the Lodge, our group wandered into the nearby forest, where the best sighting was a Racer snake in the process of eating a small mammal. We argued later whether the mammal was a Tree Shrew or a squirrel of some kind. Andrew, our Bornean guide said it was a squirrel, which settled the issue for Linda. I am pretty sure it was a Tree Shrew, but what do I know.



We ate lunch and had time to watch Lee Chong Wei of Malaysia lose the finals of Olympic Badminton Men's Singles to Lin D*** of China. During the match, we saw a pair of Black-and-red Broadbills right outside the window of the dining area. These became Linda's New Favorite Bird®.

We finally got a decent picture of our favorite mammal, the cute and incredibly speedy Plain Pygmy-squirrel. I am still kicking myself for not carrying the camera on our first visit to the cave. This is the size of a mouse.

Our trip downriver, mostly a repeat of the previous one, turned up a few new species, including a brief look at an Asian Elephant (Bornean version) mostly hidden by the vegetation along the shoreline. We have seen many Proboscis Monkeys during our various trips along the river, but most were females or young males. They don't have the big Schnozola. Only mature males have that. We were lucky. Our boatman, Joey, spotted one in a small tree along the way and took us in for this great photo. Notice that he is making sure you know he is the dominant male around.



Tuesday, August 6, 2012: Bornean Ground-cuckoo, traveling

We got to sleep in a bit this morning, as the boat didn't leave until 5:00. So, after a quick breakfast at 4:30 where I had a chance to try Lorna's taste treat of a fried egg on noodles (great!), we set off in search of "one of the rarest and least known birds of Borneo," according to the field guides, the Bornean Ground-cuckoo. A comparatively large bird, it sticks to the undergrowth along the river, seldom coming into view. According to the guide, the bird is found only from sea level to 50m, a severely restricted altitudinal range.

We explored us a small river (large creek would be more accurate) that flowed into the Kinabatangan River. It took us an hours to get to the mouth of the creek. Then we traveled slowly up the shallow waterway past several obstructions. Our boatman, Joey, again showed us his skill, maneuvering the boat around the many, mostly submerged logs clogging our passage. We went about as far as we could and turned back with only one new species, Chestnut-breasted Malkoha, to show for our efforts. As we went slowly back down the creek, we saw another boat. The boatman began gesticulating for us to hurry to where he was looking into the woods.

We drifted agonizingly slowly toward the other boat, not wishing to frighten the bird away. Once there, we learned that a pair of the Ground-cuckoos had been seen walking along the shore. After a lot of work, and some quick pointing with the lasers, everyone on the boat managed to get a good look at the pair. This was a bird I wanted since I first saw the picture in the field guide. After reading the description, I didn't expect to ever see one. We were very lucky.

We also saw Bearded Pigs, a new mammal that looks a lot like a regular pig with more hair on its face. However, as there are no domestic pigs in this officially Muslim country, we were sure of the ID.

The rest of the day was spent traveling to the Danum Valley, the final main stop on our tour.

We arrived at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge in the Danum Valley in time for a short walk around before dinner. Then we took a night drive in an open air truck at 8:00pm. During the drive, we saw a sleeping Rufous-backed Kingfisher, aka Oriental Dwarf-kingfisher, which was lucky, as we'd only seen the bird zipping past during the daylight. We also saw two Brown Wood-owls on a wire near the cabins. These were very cooperative, giving us a long look before swooping from their perch to snatch insects from the air. We rated this sighting 5-stars, one of the few such ratings for owls.

We added a mammal to the list: Thomas's Flying Squirrel, a reddish animal that delighted everyone by jumping from the tree and gliding away as we watched.

By the time we finished the night ride, it was almost 10:00pm. We fell into bed, though we weren't as tired as usual. We had the schedule for the morning, which began with breakfast at 5:15am.

At 11:00pm almost exactly — I checked the clock — an incredible storm hit. The first clap of thunder woke us up. Then we listened to rain pelting the roof for half an hour before it began to die down. By the next morning, though, it had ceased and we had a full day of exploring to do.



Wednesday, August 8, 2012: Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

Thursday, August 9, 2012: Borneo Rainforest Lodge.

Friday, August 9, 2012: Borneo Rainforest Lodge

These three days were all quite similar, so I will cover them together. The only differences were the birds we recorded on the various days. If you are interested in that, you can check the bird report associated with this blog.

Each day began with breakfast by special arrangement at 5:15. Normal people have to wait until 7:00 for a chance to eat. Then we walked around the area until time for lunch around noon. After a short siesta, we returned to the field for several hours more birding before another night drive when it could be arranged. The package for the Lodge provides for one night drive. Otherwise, we have to hope that newly arrived people won't fill up the truck, leaving room for us. The rain interfered with our plans one night. Several people had to make up a drive that was canceled. So we had only three night drives.

After dinner, we went over the checklist of everything seen that day, then returned to our cabins to sleep. As a T-shirt says, "Live is simple: Eat, Sleep, Bird." Had it been up to me, I would have allocated more time for siesta and less for birding, but this is a gung-ho group and I would probably be out-voted. Indeed, Dodge and Lorna have been known to skip the siesta altogether in favor of a chance at another lifer.

The facilities at the Lodge are superb, except there is no air-conditioning. They have gone to great lengths to reduce the carbon footprint here, and cooling was one of the items cut. We have ceiling fans everywhere, as well a "ventilation fan" in our room. I'm not sure what the intent is, but I run both fans whenever we are in the room. We have plenty of hot water, most supplied by solar power, but with a backup system for overcast days. We have not had any overcast days and generally take two showers a day, a fabulous luxury.

The food is the best since we left the Promenade Hotel in KK: first rate on any scale. A buffet offers tremendous variety, with enough dishes even for vegetarians. To top it off, the coffee is excellent, easily the best of any place we have stayed. The only other good cup on the trip was a latte I bought at the Dunkin Donuts



place in the KK airport. I have been reduced to drinking tea until now.

Our birding walks start during the morning mist, when the tops of the trees are obscured. The The photo at left shows the forest as the sun is just beginning to break thru. The mist dissipates by mid-morning, after which we turn our attention to the canopy. The picture at the top of this section is a panorama shot I took from the canopy walkway. The walkway is much more extensive than the one at the Rainforest Discovery Centre, but built in the old style, with cables holding the walkway in place and rudimentary towers around some of the trees. The picture on the right above shows a portion of the walkway leading to one of the towers. I was standing on the tallest tower, which according to a sign at the beginning is 26m (85ft) above the floor, looking down on the next section of the walkway.

We sometimes walk along the road, known as “the access road,” or on one of the many trails in the area. When we take one of the trails, we have to travel single file, behind Chris. We take turns being at the front of the line, five minutes apiece. Linda and I, to reduce the chance of *half birds*, seen by only one of us, go back to the end of the line at the same time. No one else follows this rule.

Despite this, we have some half birds to deal with. On our first afternoon, I saw a Black-and-red Pitta, a skulker who sticks to the undergrowth. Linda was unable to see the bird. I, on the other hand, discovered a *jinx bird*, an easy bird that kept eluding me: Rufous-tailed Tailorbird. Everyone else had seen it multiple times. The Pitta showed up on the second day and we all saw it well, much better than first time. On Friday morning, I finally had a fleeting look at the Tailorbird and ticked it off. However, the Plain Flowerpecker, a bird that lives up to its name, except for the flower pecking part (it eats berries), is no longer likely, so Linda will have one half bird that I need to erase sometime in the future. Despite our best efforts we have a net difference of 15 on our world life lists. The program I use to keep track of everything, Birder’s Diary, has promised a report in the next version showing differences between our two lists. Then, maybe someday we will plan to eliminate them. Not anytime soon, though. We are still seeing far too many birds together to worry yet.



One particular bird, Blue-headed Pitta, has been added to Linda’s List of Annoying Birds®. We have walked the trails repeatedly, hearing the bird call in response to a recording. However, so far, we have little to show for our efforts. One member of our group, Jim Martin (known as the other other Jim) saw one fly across the trail, but that is all.

Given the scope of the forest, you won’t be surprised to learn that we have few good bird photos to show you. Instead, we have lots of bug pictures. The one at left is Rajah Brooke’s Birdwing, a stunningly beautiful butterfly, with a red body to go with the blue-accented black wings. It has been collected to the brink of extinction, but now is fully protected in Borneo. Apparently, Rajah Brooke was an Englishman who went native on Borneo. That’s all I know of him.



Millipedes are fairly common in the forest. Here are photos of two different ones. The left hand one is called a “tractor millipede,” though I don’t know why; the right hand one, a “pill millipede,” for obvious reasons. (It is rolled up into a protective ball in the photo.)



Our second night drive, besides adding the Red Giant Flying Squirrel to our mammal list, produced fantastic views of a Malay Civet, a lovely denizen of the forest known to frequent human camp sites for leftovers. Alas, our camera was not able to cope with the dark and a fast moving animal, so we don't have a photo to show.



One trail thru the forest led to what is called the "Jacuzzi Pool," a natural pool filled by a waterfall. Linda doffed her boots and dangled her feet in the water where some fish nibbled on her toes. She expressed a desire to return for a full swim, but changed her mind when a large branch fell into the pool without warning.

Our final night drive produced no new birds or mammals, but we did get to see a new amphibian: Wallace's Flying Frog. These frogs have extra large webbing in their feet, enabling them to glide from the top of a tree to the ground, where they hunt at night. No one on the truck knew why they climb to the top of the tree in the first place, probably to escape predators. We've

include a photo of these cute denizens of the forest.

Saturday, August 11, 2012: Some last minute birding, then travel to KL

Waking up at this lodge is quite an experience. As soon as we turn on the light in our room a frog, or something, starts a chirping bark that lasts for several minutes. Outside, about 6:00 when it begins to get light, the cicadas start. One kind sounds like a chain saw, a piercing monotonous tone that lasts for minutes. Another one sounds almost exactly like a car alarm.

Just a few minutes later, the Bornean Gibbon starts its mournful hoot. We typically hear several at once, calling back and forth to establish territories. The sound carries for miles, so even though they sound close, they aren't visible. Supposedly, they have been seen from the veranda of the dining area, swinging thru the trees on the opposite side of the river. Alas, they have never been around when we are there.

This morning, the last day of the tour, I got around to asking Andrew about them. I had walked down the road to where I thought I might be able to see them, but found nothing. Andrew informed me that they could be seen from the Hornbill Trail. I replied that any mention of the Hornbill Trail was likely to elicit an expletive from me.



Yesterday, my luck avoiding the leeches that thrive in the rainforest, Hornbill Trail in particular, ran out. I thought one was on my back, but I felt around without finding anything. When we got back to our room, Linda said, "You have blood all over your shirt." I stripped off the shirt, fortunately one that dries quickly, and washed the blood out. Then, Linda noticed the leech on the floor of the bathroom. It had become fully engorged and dropped off when I removed my shirt. The result can only be described as a bloody mess.

We took photos, of course, but think they are probably not appropriate for all audiences. We'll send one to you on request. Instead, we conclude with a picture of the two of us standing in front of the largest tree we saw in the forest, a

magnificent *dipterocarp* species along the trail to the Jacuzzi pool.

As usual, Linda was unable to complete the task of selecting her five favorite birds of the trip. I was able to narrow the list down, and two of my picks would up in the consensus of the group: Bornean Ground-cuckoo, which we described, and Black-and-yellow Broadbill, my favorite. The latter is pretty, common, and has a song that is unforgettable, a rising series of notes concluding in an orgasmic finish.

Here is Linda's List: (After much dithering and browbeating by Chris)

- Brown Wood-owl, the pair seen at eye level on our first night drive.
- Bornean Stubtail: a minute skulker of the undergrowth in KNP. We saw him singing a song so high-pitched that I could not hear it.
- Whiskered Treeswift: Both sexes were seen well near the entrance to the canopy walkway at the Borneo Rainforest Lodge. An elegant bird that returns to the same perch repeatedly, making sure we have a good look.
- Black-and-red Broadbill: A pair seen well at eye level from the dining room at Bilit Lodge while watch the Olympic Men's Badminton final.
- White-Crowned Shama: A beautiful bird, the best songster of the trip.

Her original list also included:

- Red-naped Trogon, both male and female seen well
- Very small, Rufous-backed Kingfisher, seen sleeping on two night drives.
- Fabulous male Red-bearded Bee-eater, posing and croaking its strange call.
- Raffles Malkoha, both male and female
- A pair of Bornean Ground-cuckoos. This was one almost everyone's list and was the consensus choice for the best bird.
- All the hornbills, but we both like the Rhinoceros Hornbill best.
- Blue-eared Kingfisher, a tiny cobalt jewel seen from the boat, Ben's 3000th bird species.
- Rufous Piculet, undoubtedly the cutest of the many woodpeckers we saw.
- Ashy Tailorbird, which Linda saw when alone. It was singing its heart out.
- Black-and-yellow Broadbill, nicknamed the Bornean Flying Pygmy Penguin for its tuxedo-like plumage.
- Black-and-crimson Pitta, the only Pitta seen well on this trip.
- Black-capped Babbler, Black-throated Wren-babbler, and Bornean Wren-babbler, three skulkers we saw well after considerable effort.
- Bornean Blue-flycatcher, one of several Blue-flycatchers.
- Black-shouldered Kite, Linda's favorite raptor.