

Birding Borneo – The Best of Sabah

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline Itinerary

Day 1 Fly London to Kuala Lumpur

Day 2 -3 Sepilok Nature Resort

Day 4 - 5 Kinabatangan River and Gomantong Caves (if open)

Day 6 - 9 Kinabatangan to Tabin

Day 7 - 8 Tabin

Day 9 Tabin to Kinabalu NP

Day 10 – 11 Kinabalu NP

Day 12 Arrive London

Departs

September/October

Focus

Birds & Mammals

Grading

A/B. Day walks only.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code MYS01) or brochure

Highlights

- Varied and colourful avifauna in pristine rainforests
- Up to 8 hornbill species, Pittas, Bornean Bristlehead and many other endemics
- Orangutan, Proboscis Monkey, Pygmy Elephant and other mammals also targets.
- Expertly guided by a Malaysian ornithologist



Bornean Bristlehead, Rhinoceros Hornbill and Pygmy Elephant at Tabin



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Introduction

Sabah is widely recognised as one of the most productive birding destinations in South-East Asia and boasts an amazing avifauna which includes such mouth-watering possibilities as Bornean Bristlehead (in its own endemic family) sumptuous Pittas (including the endemic Blue-headed and Black-crowned), several species of Broadbills and Trogons, the endangered Storm's Stork (at one of its few remaining strongholds), amazing Rhinoceros Hornbills (and up to seven other Hornbill species), raptors such as Wallace's Hawk Eagle and endemic White-fronted Falconet plus Buffy Fish Owl and a wealth of other rainforest birds.

At the amazing Gomantong Caves, dusk unveils the spectacular exodus of millions of bats (eight or more species roost in the caves). Bat Hawks and Peregrine Falcons will utilize this amazing exodus too, exploiting this abundant food supply. Blue-headed Pitta, Wreathed or Bushy-crested Hornbills, and even an Orangutan are often found in the surrounding reserve.

This semi-autonomous region in the north-east corner of Borneo is familiar territory for Naturetrek and we have been operating wildlife tours to Sabah for over twenty years. This highly varied tour will cover the very best habitats of Sabah, focusing on finding a great many of the region's birds; we can hope to find around 200 bird species, while also targeting the key mammal species.



Kinabalu National Park

Itinerary

NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

In Flight

We depart London on a direct scheduled service flight to Kuala Lumpur.

Day 2

Sepilok

In the early hours of this morning we will arrive into Kuala Lumpur, the ultra-modern and rapidly expanding capital of Malaysia. We will soon board our onward flight to Sandakan in Sabah and then drive to Sepilok around 30 minutes from the town. After arriving we will settle in and explore the lodge grounds for those who wish before dinner and a briefing of the adventure ahead. After dinner we will head out for an optional night walk in the forest to search for the abundant nocturnal wildlife. A roosting Hooded Pitta maybe or Collared Scops Owl, Red Giant Flying Squirrel may be found as well as a whole host of reptiles, amphibians and other mammals.



Hooded Pitta (*Pitta sordida*)

Day 3

Sepilok

We will wake early this morning for a dawn visit to the Rainforest Discovery Centre. The lowland primary rainforest at Sepilok can be accessed at the Rainforest Discovery Centre with an impressive (solid) canopy walkway and excellent forest trails. Highlights on a visit here might include the endemic and striking Bornean Bristlehead, Blue-headed Pitta, Rufous-collared Kingfisher, Blue-throated Bee-eater, up to eight species of Hornbill, Red-naped and Scarlet-rumped Trogons, White-bellied, Buff-rumped and Buff-necked Woodpeckers, Black-and-red and Black-and-yellow Broadbills, Rufous-bellied Eagle, Grey-rumped Treeswift and Silver-rumped Spinetail to name just a small selection. Although we will be concentrating on the birdlife we will also make an effort to find mammals of course and Orangutans are sometimes seen here while a range of squirrels and treeshrews are also possible.

After a wildlife filled start to the day birding in this wonderful forest, we shall return the short distance to the lodge for breakfast and then continue on to the Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary. These sites are all very close to our base so there is very little traveling and all are actually within walking distance.

At the Sepilok Orangutan Sanctuary, captive orangs are reintroduced into the wild. These animals are brought to the centre for a second chance in life and once fit enough, are released into the protected forest here. Food is provided for them still once released to help with their life in the wild and some individuals come in to take advantage of this. We should be able to observe them at their feeding station in the rainforest at close quarters. Pig and Long-tailed Macaques may also be seen here and birds are numerous and may include Copper-throated Sunbird, Blue-eared barbet and Rhinoceros Hornbill.

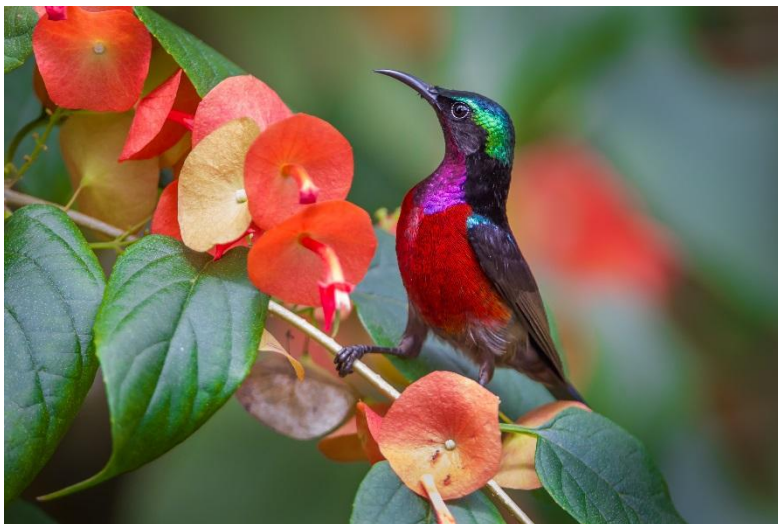
We will return for lunch at the lodge and in the afternoon, we will go walking in the Sepilok Forest Reserve again trying to find such targets as Bornean Bristlehead, Black-crowned Pitta, Red-naped Trogon, Diard's Trogon, White-crowned Shama, Black-and-red, Black-and-yellow and Brown Broadbill with a range of other wildlife of course. We then will make sure we are on the canopy walkway again at dusk in order to see Red Giant Flying Squirrels emerge from their nests. These squirrels can "fly" up to 500 feet between trees which is a wonderful sight to see and special nest boxes have been put up for them here.

We will again return for dinner at the lodge and for those who wish we will then head out for a night walk to search for nocturnal wildlife once more. A Colugo maybe or Slow Loris may be picked out in the spotlight.

Day 4

Sepilok to Kinabatangan River

Again before breakfast there will be an optional birding outing from the lodge itself where we may find Crimson and Van Hasselt's Sunbird, Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker, Asian Fairy Bluebird and much more while Plantain Squirrels are commonly seen. After breakfast we shall have a very special, behind-the-scenes, tour of the nearby Bornean Sun Bear Conservation Centre. We shall see and learn about the wonderful Bornean Sun Bear and to have special access with the founder of the



Van Hasselt's Sunbird (*Leptocoma brasiliana*)

centre is a real treat and will take us to areas not possible for the public. After a most fascinating visit we will return to the lodge and continue to the Kinabatangan River.

The Kinabatangan River is home to one of the highest concentrations of wildlife in all of Borneo. A wonderful corridor or protected forest awaits us and on arrival we shall settle into our lodge before taking a cruise at dusk. Here we will look for our

first truly wild Orangutans while Pygmy Elephants will also be a big target as we go birding in this rich habitat. This is also the very best place to find troops of Proboscis Monkeys. These endemic

primates feed in large family groups of up to 30 or more individuals in the riverside trees. These will be mainly females and young animals with 1 dominant male.

Birding in the Kinabatangan is easy and we will be birding largely from a boat for the majority of our time in search for birds along the waterways. Kingfishers, raptors, hornbills, and much more reside in abundance in this region. On our first outing we may enjoy Black-and-yellow broadbill, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Wreathed, Wrinkled, Asian black and White-crowned hornbill and we will aim for the very rare and range restricted Storm's Stork. Stork-billed, Collared and Blue-eared kingfisher will be targets and just some of the special birds we will enjoy.

Back at the lodge we will enjoy dinner and head out on a night walk for those who wish. Nocturnal wildlife such as Slow Loris, Western Tarsiers, Civets, Great Mouse Deer and more can be found. The Borneo Nature Lodge has excellent trails and boardwalks for searching for wildlife around the property. Orangutan and Silver leaf Langurs are often on the property and the birding is excellent with the chance of Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Rufous Woodpecker, Lesser Cuckoo-Shrike and Dark-throated Oriole to name just a few. There is a good night walk trail here too.

Day 5

Kinabatangan River and Gomantong Caves

Today we will watch the sunrise on an early morning river cruise on the Kinabatangan. The floodplain of the Lower Kinabatangan River is a low-lying wilderness covered by a patchwork of natural rainforest and a corridor of protected forest from the ever-encroaching oil-palm plantations. The whole area is dotted with oxbow lakes and limestone outcrops providing a wonderful habitat.

We will search again for species including Storm's Stork (this area represents one of the most reliable sites for this endangered species anywhere) while White-fronted Falconet may be found, Wallace's Hawk-eagle, White-bellied Sea Eagle and Lesser Fish Eagle are all possible. Bornean Ground Cuckoo, Hooded and Black-headed Pittas (with an outside chance of Giant Pitta), Diard's Trogon, Stork-billed, Blue-eared and Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers, Moustached Hawk-



Storm's Stork (*Ciconia stormi*)

cuckoo, Bat Hawk, Buffy Fish Owl, Whiskered Treeswift, up to four species of Malkoha and all 8 Hornbill species have been recorded here. Of course there are many smaller birds as well, though watching these from the boats is not too easy. The river also provides an excellent opportunity to find Pygmy Elephants and our guides will know if a herd are in the area and we shall try to see them! After a wonderful start to the day on the river we will return to our lodge to relax or explore around the grounds before lunch. Many birds can be seen from the lodge with various babblers,

bulbuls and flycatchers to keep us entertained! It's also a great place for photographing dragonflies and butterflies.

After lunch, we will take a short boat ride and overland transfer or around 15 minutes to the world famous Gomantong Caves. We will spend the afternoon walking in the reserve and also explore inside the caves themselves for those who wish. We will take our time to enjoy the spectacle provided by these awesome caverns.

Here there are two massive cathedral-like cave systems that penetrate deep inside two huge limestone outcrops concealed amongst an area of lowland rainforest not far from the Kinabatangan River. The caves tower to staggering heights of 100 metres or more, and are home to literally millions of bats and, seasonally, swiftlets. It is here that every 3-4 months local tribesmen come, for a week at a time, to gather the nests that are used by the Chinese to make 'birds-nest soup'. The way in which these people reach the heights of these caves on precarious, locally-made ropes and bamboo ladders is terrifying and incredible. Inevitably it is a high risk job, and although the middle men take most of the money it is still of such economic value to the tribesmen that each of the cave entrances are guarded day and night throughout the year.



Whiskered Treeswift (*Hemiprocne coronata*)

As well as visiting one of the main caves, we will look for wildlife in the rich rainforest along the entrance road, perhaps finding a Blue-headed Pitta, Wreathed or Bushy-crested Hornbills, or even an Orangutan. Towards dusk we will wait outside the caves to observe the spectacular exodus of millions of bats (8 or more species roost in the caves) and to watch the Bat Hawks and Peregrines which exploit the abundant food supply. After a special afternoon we will return the short distance to the lodge for dinner. After dinner we will set out for a night cruise on the river in search of nocturnal wildlife on the riverbanks and in the trees lining the river and smaller tributaries.

NB: Please note that currently the Gomantong Caves are closed due to damage to the boardwalk there. We are uncertain of when the caves will reopen. If we are unable to visit, more time instead will be spent on the wildlife-rich Kinabatangan River. If you are very keen to visit a cave system, we can arrange an extension to Mulu. The caves at Mulu are far more extensive and it is an excellent experience.

Day 6

Kinabatangan to Tabin

Today we will leave the river and move on to the wonderful Tabin Wildlife Reserve. Tabin embraces mature secondary and primary lowland rainforest which we will bird on foot along the road and on forest trails and by vehicle. This superb area for birding boasts a reserve list of over 250 species and with luck it is possible to see 70 or 80 species in a day including many Borneo specialities. We will be accommodated for our stay in ideally situated tourist cabins which ensure we are right in the heart of the birding action for our short visit. Highlights birding at Tabin might include Great Argus and Crested Fireback Pheasants, Great-billed Heron, Large Green, Thick-billed and Little Green Pigeons, Blue-headed and Black-headed Pittas, Leafbirds, Hornbills, Malkohas and Trogons, Brown Wood Owl, Great Slaty, Crimson-winged and Olive-backed Woodpeckers, Blue-banded Kingfisher, White-fronted Falconet, various spiderhunters and sunbirds, numerous bulbuls and babblers etc and the list goes on. Mammals might include Bornean Gibbon, Orangutan and Pygmy Elephant. With many trails and tracks to choose from we will use our time to ensure that we maximize our birdwatching opportunities in this delightful tract of forest.

On our arrival at Tabin we will settle in and bird around the lodge on the various trails near the river here and after dark we will head out in 4x4s spotlighting in search of mammals and birds. The night drives can be very productive here with Leopard Cat a very regular sight, civets numerous with Malay, Island Palm and Bornean-striped Civet the most abundant species. Black Giant Flying Squirrel are often found and Slow Loris too. Although extremely rare there have been sightings of Sunda Clouded Leopard here also. Buffy Fish Owl is very common and we will also hope for Barred Eagle Owl, Brown Wood Owl and Sundan Frogmouth.

Days 7 - 8

Tabin

We will have two full days to explore and enjoy Tabin. On day one we will take an early morning birding walk at first light from the lodge itself and we will also search for the family of North Bornean



Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*)

Gibbons that live around the lodge. We are likely to hear the amazing sound of the adult dominant animals in the early morning. These animals' pair for life and stay in a close knit family group. We shall be birding as we search for the Gibbons which will likely be in a nearby fruiting tree. Birds we can hope to find are numerous. 15 species of woodpecker have been recorded at Tabin. The huge Great Slaty Woodpecker will

be a target and beautiful Crimson-winged Woodpecker just two. White-browed Shama and Oriental

Dwarf Kingfisher are often around the lodge while the core area road is around 10km long leading to the primary rainforest where a whole range of wonderful birds can be found.

After breakfast we will drive by 4x4 towards the core area for birding along the dirt road through the forest. The rare Helmeted Hornbill may be found here (with all 8 of Borneo's Hornbills sound at Tabin), Dusky Munia often flit in the grasses while Black-crowned Pitta will be another of the many targets. Thick-billed, Long-billed and Grey-breasted Spiderhunters will be searched for, Plain and Purple-throated Sunbirds, Red-naped and Scarlet-rumped Trogons and raptors may include Changeable Hawk-eagle, Crested Goshawk and the world's smallest raptor and an endemic species, the White-



Changeable Hawk-eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*)

fronted Falconet. The wildlife here is rich and varied and following lunch the afternoon activity may be to choose between a trek to the mud volcano or an afternoon drive for those who prefer not to take a forest walk. Both options will yield a great range of exciting species. After dinner back at the lodge there will again be the opportunity to head out after dark for a night drive to search for more mammals and birds with the spotlight

One day two we will have a full day to explore the superb Tabin reserve once more with a mix of walks and drives focusing on finding species we have previously missed and exploring this huge area further. The tracks here are frequented by Pygmy Elephants regularly and with luck we may encounter them as we move around the reserve. The number of bird species available is very impressive and we will set out to find as many as we can.

Day 9

Tabin to Mount Kinabalu

After a final early morning exploration from the lodge for those who wish and breakfast, we shall bid Tabin farewell and return to Lahad Datu for a short flight to Kota Kinabalu. Upon arrival to Kota Kinabalu, we will embark on a 2-hour drive to the Kinabalu National Park HQ where we will check in to our comfortable lodge before heading out for an afternoon of birding.

At 4,101 metres (13,455 feet) Mount Kinabalu is the highest mountain between the eastern Himalaya and New Guinea and its forested slopes hold a rich diversity of montane and sub-montane fauna and flora. It also attracts many visitors wishing to trek to the summit to witness the spectacular sunrise over the surrounding lush Bornean hills. For the next two-nights we will be based just 1km and a 2-minute drive from the National Park entrance in comfortable tourist

accommodation. We will explore the excellent network of trails that radiate out into the montane evergreen mossy forest. In the mixed feeding flocks that rove the woodlands we will find many of the commoner species such as Chestnut-hooded and Sunda Laughingthrushes, Chestnut-crested Yuhina, Mountain Leaf-warbler and Yellow-breasted Warbler, White-throated Fantail, Grey-throated Babbler, Black-capped White-eye, Temminck's Sunbird, Ashy and Spangled Drongos, Black and Crimson Orioles, Bornean Green Magpie and Bornean Treepie. Amongst these we also search for some of the harder to find species including Crimson-headed Partridge, Temminck's Babbler, Black-breasted Fruithunter, Eye-browed Jungle Flycatcher, Bornean Stubtail and, of course, the legendary Whiteheads's trio: Whitehead's Trogon, Spiderhunter and Broadbill. The large mammal fauna is poor, but there is a host of squirrels and treeshrews to look for, including the delightful Whitehead's Pygmy Squirrel.

Day 10

Mount Kinabalu

We will have a full day today to explore the park and enjoy this wonderful habitat. There are a range of trails to walk and the species to be found here are numerous. This habitat is a complete contrast to the lowland rainforest we will have experienced previously on the tour with a high altitude moss and lichen covered forest providing a habitat for a whole host of special species. 18 Bornean endemics can be found here and just some of the species we may encounter will be Mountain Black Eye, Mountain Blackbird, Bornean Treepie, Kinabalu Serpent Eagle, Red-breasted Wood Partridge, Bornean Mountain Whistler, Orange-headed Thrush, Everett's Thrush and Eyebrowed Thrush to name but a few. We shall also continue in our efforts to see Whitehead's Trogon, Spiderhunter and Broadbill. Some of the trails



Whitehead's Trogon (*Harpactes whiteheadi*)

here vary in elevation on narrow paths but most of the walks will be along the road here as this is the best tactic for connecting with the greatest number of species. Usually we would start in the early morning up at Timpohon gate at 1800 meters above sea level (this is the entrance to the mountain climbing trail) and bird here for 1-2 hours. Activity is great here and a lot of the endemics

can be found. Then it will be a case of slowly working back along the road down heading downhill in search of fruiting/flowering trees and mixed flocks passing across the road.

This will be an excellent full days birding within the National Park with the intention of finding as many of the parks special birds as we can, picking up the various squirrels and treeshrews as we go.

Day 11

Mount Kinabalu – Transfer to Airport

Today we will have the morning to get out birding once more to search for species we may have previously missed and to enjoy this wonderful habitat. We will have a late afternoon flight so will have until around lunchtime before transferring back to Kota Kinabalu for our flight to Kuala Lumpur and then Heathrow.

Day 12

London

After the change of aircraft at Kuala Lumpur, and an overnight flight, we are due to arrive back in London early morning.

Tour Grading & Focus

B. Most of the trails at Sepilok, Tabin and those from Borneo Nature Lodge are good, although some become a little more difficult if the season is very wet. Whilst the walks should not be strenuous, the heat and humidity can be tiring at times. Trails on Mount Kinabalu are in places steep so this part of the itinerary is rated B. They are all good paths, often with rails and we will be moving very slowly as we search for birds and wildlife.

This birding tour aims to find as many of Sabah's wonderful bird species as we can while also trying to see the star mammals as we go. As we are birding we will be aiming for the mammals too and key species such as Orangutan, Proboscis Monkey and Elephant will be targeted while spotlighting sessions will reveal many more mammals. A wonderful cross-section of Sabah's wildlife can be expected on this holiday with all major habitat types covered.



Bornean Green Magpie (*Cissa jefferyi*)

Weather, Clothing & Equipment

Malaysia has a typical tropical climate. It is hot and humid all year round. The temperature rarely drops below 20C, and usually climbs to 30C or more during the day. The wet season in Sabah is generally considered to run from June to December (November and December being the wettest). However, being a tropical country it can rain at any time, frequently and heavily. When not raining, however, it is usually sunny! Recently locals have begun to deny any pattern to the weather, saying that relying on wet and dry seasons is a thing of the past. You can reasonably expect plenty of sun, plenty of rain and hot temperatures. In Kinabalu NP it will be noticeably cooler and mornings can

be chilly with more wind possible here. Binoculars are of course essential for this holiday, and a telescope will be useful, if you have one.

What's Included

All food is included, as well as soft drinks and juices which are provided throughout and snacks which are provided on our longer transfers in vehicles. All incidental tips (for lodge guides, drivers, and porters) are included. Entrance fees and camera fees are included in all locations but please see below on larger fixed lenses at Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre. On arrival, each group member is also given leech socks and a re-useable water bottle as a welcome gift.

At Sepilok Orangutan Rehabilitation Centre, for any camera with zoom lens from 100 to 400mm, video camera or other video recording equipment for personal use are chargeable at RM10.00 per unit (around £2). For any camera (**fixed-lens** - 400mm and above) or any film-making equipment are chargeable at RM1,000.00 per unit (around £200). Mode of payment is cash only.

Extending Your Holiday

Extensions are possible on this itinerary and popular options are to extend to Gaya Island Resort which is just offshore of Kota Kinabalu. This is the ideal extension for those wishing to relax, with a lovely beach and snorkeling possible and there is also some great intact forest on the island so birding is also possible. Extending for extra nights to explore the Kinabalu National Park further is also an option. Please speak to operations manager Tom Mabbett if you would like further details.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements at the time of booking.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.



Blue-headed Pitta (*Hydronis baudi*)