ITINERARY

BORNEO

Tour I: March 31-April 17, 2027
Tour II: June 15-July 2, 2027



Borneo has a number of endemic birds, many of which are quite colorful. The Blue-headed Pitta is found in the lower elevation forests, where it is considered to be vulnerable to habitat loss. Photograph by participant Sam Buttrick.

We include here information for those interested in the 2027 Field Guides Borneo *tour:*

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable species or sightings (may be dowloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing for and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

From a naturalist's viewpoint, Borneo, the world's third largest island, is one of the richest places on Earth, rightfully deserving of the many superlatives it elicits. Its lowland rainforest, which used to cover most of the island but is rapidly being cut, is not only the oldest and among the most diverse in the world, but the tallest as well—the main canopy measures 200 feet (61m) with emergents to a staggering 277 feet (84m)! Towering above these ancient dipterocarp forests, at more than 13,000 feet (4095m), is majestic Mt. Kinabalu, the highest mountain between the Himalayas and New Guinea and the largest batholith on Earth. Its montane forests support species of Himalayan and Australasian affinities—oaks (of 70 species!), eucalypts, laurels, magnolias, and gymnosperms—as well as a great diversity of more tropical species. There are 26 species of rhododendrons, 80 species of figs, more than 620 species of ferns, and some

850 species of orchids. One hardy little plant on its rugged, granitic summit also occurs through Indonesia and New Guinea to New Zealand *and* in the high Andes, a remnant of a time when Antarctica still linked South America to Australia.

Its biogeographic history, its equatorial location, its diversity of flora, and the incredible stature of its rainforest have all contributed to the terrific diversification of its fauna. From invertebrates (e.g., 4000-plus species of moths) to mammals (140 species), there is amazing diversity of form. There are "flying" frogs, lizards, and snakes, and 14 species of flying squirrels, from the 5-inch Lesser Pygmy Flying Squirrel to the 3-foot Red Giant Flying Squirrel. Big, charismatic mammals include Bornean Pygmy Elephants, the Colugo (also known as the flying lemur), the agile and vocal Bornean Gibbon, the strange Proboscis Monkey, and the beloved Orangutan (also known as the "Old Man of the Forest"). The birds are equally exciting, from a host of rare and little-known endemics, including the bizarre Bornean Bristlehead (a monotypic family), the monotypic Fruit-hunter, several shy pittas, and the dazzling Whitehead's Broadbill, to a representative sampling of classic Asian groups. The forests ring with the cries of pheasants, partridges, serpent-eagles, hornbills, barbets, broadbills, pittas, babblers, and bulbuls, sometimes joined by the haunting hollering of primates. The diversity of birds is surpassed only in lowland Amazonia.



We'll have the opportunity to see many hornbills on this tour, including the endangered Helmeted Hornbill, a Sundaland endemic. Photograph by participant Linnet Tse.

Our tours will focus on three prime areas in the northeastern state of Sabah, politically a part of Malaysia: the Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, the Danum Valley Conservation Area, and the magnificent Kinabalu Park. We'll have time to enjoy not only a high proportion of the more than 40 endemic birds possible along our route, but a plethora of more widespread birds and other wildlife. Our accommodations amidst such wildness are remarkably comfortable, all with hot-water showers, delicious food, and impressive views of our surroundings. Their proximity to some of the best birding makes possible afternoon breaks and optional forays by day and by night. The flexibility afforded by staying right in good habitat makes our itinerary appropriate for both veterans of Asian birding and those seeking an introduction to the birds of Sundaland or Southeast Asia. Join us for an exciting exploration of the mystique that is Borneo.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour. Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements for the tour:

- **TRAILS AND WALKING:** This tour involves good amounts of walking: as much as 2-3 miles in morning and 1-2 miles in afternoon, sometimes on trails that have slippery, steep, muddy, or uneven sections. Some trails may have roots, stumps fallen limbs, rock or other obstacles to maneuver around. Good balance is essential and walking sticks are recommended for those who use them.
- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** In some places, we'll spend time standing and waiting for birds to come in; this can be tiring, especially in the heat and humidity of the lowlands. We'll take a number of river trips along the Kinabatangan and its tributaries in small motorized boats; you'll need to be able to climb into and out of the boat, including via the bow (front) of the boat on those occasions where we disembark on a muddy bank to chase down a bird or make a bush stop. We'll bird from several canopy towers and walkways, so the ability to climb stairs and view from heights will be needed. Boardwalks at the Gomantong Caves may be slippery with guano. The combination of high temperature and humidity in the Danum Valley may be challenging for those unaccustomed to the tropics. Land leeches require proper preparation (see the Information Bulletin).
- **PACE:** We will start early, with breakfast at 5:30 a.m. most days, so that we can miss the heat of the day. On a few occasions, we'll bird through the day with a midday stop at a restaurant, but on most days, we'll return to our lodgings for lunch and a bit of a midday break. On our transfer days, we'll travel by vehicle to our hotel in the afternoon. There will be several (optional) nighttime excursions to look for birds, mammals, and other creatures; we usually return to our lodge by 10:00 p.m.
- **WEATHER:** The climate is tropical. Daytime temperatures range from 60F in montane areas to 90F or slightly higher in the lowlands. Nighttime temperatures will be correspondingly lower, especially at Kinabalu. The humidity is quite high (90% or more in the lowlands) and may make temperatures seem higher in the lowlands and lower in the highlands. Rain is always a possibility.
- **ELEVATION:** We'll do most of our birding near sea level, though at Kinabalu Park, we'll bird primarily between 5000 and 6500 feet.
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for those with medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** While we'll use indoor facilities where they're available, our options in some places will be limited, so participants should be prepared for the inevitable bush stop. Be aware that some stalls at restaurants and visitor's centers have squat-type toilets (i.e. a porcelain pan with places for your feet beside a hole in the floor) rather than sitting toilets, though most have at least one sitting toilet.
- **OPTING OUT:** Where we are staying multiple days in the same lodging, you can easily opt to sit out a half or full day. This will not be possible on days when we are changing locations.

About the Birding Areas

Rainforest Discovery Center, only 40 minutes from Sandakan, is located at the edge of the extensive Orangutan Rehabilitation Center. For us, its considerable draw is its sturdy, well-constructed canopy walkway and observation towers, which allow us to spend precious time in the canopy, sorting out numerous rainforest canopy specialists eye to eye. Among the many possibilities at the canopy walkway are Raffles's and Chestnut-breasted malkohas, Violet Cuckoo, Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo, Red-naped and Scarlet-rumped trogons, Red-bearded Bee-eater, Brown, Banded, and Black-and-yellow broadbills; a number of woodpeckers, including Great Slaty, White-bellied, Maroon, Buff-necked, Buff-rumped, Banded, Rufous, Orange-backed, and the tiny Gray-and-buff; Ashy Tailorbird, White-bellied Erpornis, Black-naped Monarch, Van Hasselt's Sunbird, and (with great luck) the bizarre Bornean Bristlehead, a monotypic endemic that wanders in pairs or family groups through the rainforest canopy, uttering far-carrying screams. It's a wonderful place for our introduction to the tropical lowlands. We will also be attempting a visit here in the evening on our night at Sandakan, where some of the interesting mammals that lurk in this forest are possible.

The Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary lies within the vast floodplain of the Kinabatangan River, the longest river in Sabah. Originating in the state's southwestern corner, the river flows 347 miles through eastern Sabah, emptying into the Sulu Sea. Established in 1999, the 65,000-acre sanctuary stretches from the tidal lower reaches, lined with mangroves, to the vast forests of the upper basin. It is home to Sabah's largest population of the extraordinary Proboscis Monkey, a Bornean endemic, as well as to such other mammals as the striking Prevost's Squirrel, Bornean Pygmy Elephant, Gray

Gibbon, and the magnificent Orangutan. In fact, the Kinabatangan floodplain is one of only two places on earth where ten species of primates occur together. Saltwater crocodiles glide menacingly through the water here, and even sharks and rays—usually considered sea-based—occur in some stretches.



The bird life is equally diverse, and the species we'll seek along the rivers by boat and by boardwalk include the endangered Storm's Stork (whose world population is estimated at 400-500 birds), Lesser Adjutant, Oriental Darter, Jerdon's Baza, Lesser and Gray-headed fish-eagles, White-bellied Sea-Eagle, White-fronted Falconet, Cinnamon-headed Pigeon, Large Green-Pigeon, Long-tailed Parakeet, Moustached Hawk-Cuckoo, Greater and Lesser coucals, Blue-eared, Stork-billed, Rufous-backed Dwarf-, and Ruddy kingfishers, Black-and-red and Dusky broadbills, Hooded Pitta, Oriental Pied-, Black, Bushy-crested, White-crowned, Wreathed, Wrinkled, Rhinoceros, and Helmeted hornbills, Scarlet-rumped, Red-naped, and Diard's trogons, Malaysian Blue-Flycatcher, Rufous-tailed Tailorbird, White-chested Babbler, and Dusky Munia. With luck, we could even encounter the rarely-seen Bornean Ground-Cuckoo.

The Sukau Rainforest Lodge is ten minutes by boat from the Sukau village dock. The lodge offers some decent birding right on the grounds, with a well-maintained loop boardwalk right behind our rooms that offers easy access to seasonally flooded forest, by day and by night. Hairy-backed Bulbul, Ruby-cheeked Sunbird and Ruddy Kingfisher are possibilities among the trees and Black-capped Babblers sometimes walk right under the boardwalk! Creeping around the boardwalk after dark could disclose a foraging Malay Stink-Badger (reminiscent of our skunks), an all-white Moon Rat (a possum-like critter related to shrews and moles) or the strikingly marked Malay Civet. But most of our birding around the Kinabatangan will be done by boat. We have access to some lovely forested tributaries where we'll watch the Proboscis Monkeys gather to roost (and socialize!) along the river and use our electric motors to cruise quietly in search of calling ground-cuckoos. On at least one evening, we'll plan to go out in the boats after dark in search of Buffy Fish-Owl (which hunts above the water's edge), Oriental Bay-Owl, and nocturnal mammals; a few past groups have gotten to watch Flat-headed Cat or Clouded Leopard foraging along the edge of the water. We'll have four nights based at Sukau Rainforest Lodge, as there is much to be seen around the Kinabatangan.

Gomantong Caves, cathedral-like caverns housed in a limestone massif, are only a short detour off our route from Sepilok to Sukau and only a 45-minute drive from the Sukau boat landing. The access road runs through a selectively logged forest reserve and provides plenty of good birding right along the road. Possibilities include White-fronted Falconet, Bat Hawk, Green Imperial-Pigeon, Diard's, Cinnamon-rumped, and Scarlet-rumped trogons, Rufous Piculet, Gray-capped and Olive-backed woodpeckers, Banded, Black-and-yellow, and Dusky broadbills, Black-crowned and Western Hooded pittas, Scarlet and Fiery minivets, Red-throated, Gold-whiskered, Black-eared, and Brown barbets, Raffles's and Black-bellied malkohas, Plain and Van Hasselt's sunbirds, Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker, and a variety of raptors and babblers.

Another purpose of our visit here will be entering the caves themselves. Four species of swiftlets nest in the lower "black-nest" cave, three of them virtually indistinguishable in the field. Lacking the sonar navigation capabilities of the other three, many Plume-toed Swiftlets nest in the well-lit area near the entrance to the cave. The others nest in the darker recesses of the high-ceilinged cavern, each building quite a distinctive nest. The most common breeder in this cave is the Black-nest Swiftlet. Its nests are indeed blackish, containing numerous body feathers glued together with the saliva of the swiftlets themselves. These nests, along with those of its close relative, the White-nest (Edible-nest) Swiftlet, are harvested twice a year for the Chinese and gourmet food industries—once when they are first built (after which they

re-nest) and then after they are abandoned at the end of the nesting season. These harvests have been going on for thousands of years. The White-nest Swiftlet constructs its nest almost entirely of saliva, making it much more easily processed and thus far more valuable than that of the Black-nest Swiftlet. Only by seeing the birds sitting atop these strikingly white little cups glued to the cave wall can we be assured we are watching White-nest Swiftlets. The third look-alike, Mossy-nest Swiftlet, builds on ledges and covers its twiggy nest with moss; its nests are rarely harvested at all and are often situated fairly low, where incubating adults allow a close approach. The harvesting season varies a bit from year to year but could well be going on during our visit; in that case the caves may be closed to visitors.

A (slippery) boardwalk makes a big loop through the "black-nest" cave and the floor of the cave covered with an incredible accumulation of guano, itself writhing with invertebrate life from cockroaches and centipedes to scavenging crabs. It's quite the scene! If we're allowed in, we'll enter the cave at leasts far enough to identify all the swiftlets—all of which usually nest not far in from the mouth. Weather permitting, we'll plan to stay one evening until close to 6 p.m., hoping to witness the impressive emergence of thousands of Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed Bats, which are easy prey for hungry Bat Hawks and Brahminy Kites. We'll visit the Gomantong Caves area at least twice, and possibly three times in conjunction with our visit to the Kinabatangan.



Plume-toed Swiflets, which build mossy cup nests, are widespread across most of Sabah.
Photograph by participant Thomas Olsen.

The Danum Valley Conservation Area, encompassing more than 100,000 acres in the upper basin of the Segama River, contains Sabah's most extensive protected area of primary lowland dipterocarp rainforest. Among the oldest in the world, these forests harbor plant diversity that competes with areas of Amazonia for the title of richest forest on Earth. And not only is the forest rich, it is breathtakingly beautiful, with many emergent trees stretching more than 200 feet skyward. Such botanical richness is, of course, reflected in the faunal diversity. The avifauna is that typical of the lowland forests of Malaysia, along with a number of Bornean endemics. Notable possibilities include Sabah Partridge, Black Eagle, Blyth's and Wallace's hawk-eagles, Blue-rumped Parrot, Blue-crowned Hanging-Parrot, Raffles's, Red-billed, Black-bellied, and Chestnut-breasted malkohas, Whiskered and Gray-rumped treeswifts, Red-naped, Diard's, and Scarlet-rumped trogons, Rufous-backed Dwarf-, Banded, and Rufous-collared kingfishers, eight species of hornbills (including the incomparable Helmeted), five species of barbets (including Yellow-crowned and Red-throated), Rufous Piculet, Rufous, Crimson-winged, Banded, Checker-throated, Olive-backed, Orange-backed, and Gray-and-buff woodpeckers, Black-and-yellow, Banded, and Green broadbills, Giant Pitta (rare), Large Woodshrike, Rufous-winged and Maroon-breasted philentomas, Green Iora, Ventriloqual Oriole, Spotted Fantail, Blyth's (Asian) Paradise-Flycatcher, the Bornean race of Crested Jayshrike, the Bornean race of Black Magpie, Slender-billed Crow, White-crowned and Chestnut-naped forktails, a wonderful array of babblers, Yellow-breasted, Yellow-rumped, Yellow-vented, and Orange-bellied flowerpeckers, Ruby-

cheeked, Red-throated, and Crimson sunbirds, seven species of spiderhunters, and the following Bornean endemics: White-fronted Falconet, Black-crowned, Bornean Banded-, and Blue-headed pittas, Bornean and Black-throated wren-babblers, Bornean Blue-Flycatcher, Bornean Spiderhunter, and the bizarre and enigmatic Bornean Bristlehead, whose taxonomic affinities are still being debated. (It's now thought to be part of a large radiation of Old World shrike-like birds, including vangas, bush-shrikes, helmet-shrikes, wattle-eyes, ioras, woodshrikes, philentomas, and flycatcher-shrikes.) The towering forest is a great place for woodpeckers and forest kingfishers, and a fruiting fig here could attract an impressive variety of barbets, broadbills, bulbuls, and fabulous hornbills—from small Black and Bushy-crested to giant Wreathed and Rhinoceros and the spectacular Helmeted, whose maniacal laughter can "bear the forest away." A Great-billed Heron might be seen right along the river from our dining table, and Bornean Crested Firebacks, of the race *nobilis*, sometimes stroll around the lodge grounds. It will take great luck to stumble into Great Argus foraging along a forest trail, though we'll probably hear their far-carrying calls. We'll bird along roads and trails and from towers connected by a secure subcanopy walkway. We'll focus on finding the Bornean endemics and Sundaland specialties, but we'll have three full days plus part of a morning to enjoy the abundance of bulbuls, babblers, and the like as well. By night, we'll search for Brown Wood-Owl (which sometimes hunts near our rooms) and Sunda Frogmouth, exotic "flying" frogs and mammals, and an array of other nocturnal critters, from endemic geckos and arboreal tarantulas to one of the world's longest stick insects.

The mammals that inhabit the wilderness here are among the foremost reasons for coming to Danum Valley. The reserve has one of the largest populations of Orangutans in Borneo (split by some authors as *Pongo pygmaeus*, Bornean Orangutan), and we should see these incredible apes in the wild, possibly even watching them build their nightly "nests" or beds. Other possible diurnal primates include Gray (Bornean) Gibbon, Pig-tailed Macaque, and Red Leaf Monkey (aka Maroon Langur). Based at the wonderfully comfortable Borneo Rainforest Lodge, right in the forest, we'll be able to make nocturnal excursions for both mammals and birds. We'll have a chance for Greater and Lesser mouse-deer, Thomas's, Black, and Red giant flying squirrels, Common Palm, Masked Palm, and Malay civets, Colugo (our closest relative outside the other primates), and even such rare and primitive primates as Slow Loris and the goggle-eyed Horsfield's (Western) Tarsier. Leopard Cats and Clouded Leopards still stalk the forests of Danum Valley as well; the possibilities are staggering!



We've had wonderful experiences with Orangutans, including observing mothers with their young. Photograph by guide Doug Gochfeld.

Crocker Range National Park, situated at around 4,000 feet (1200m), shares many of Borneo's montane endemics with Mt. Kinabalu, but these middle elevations offer better opportunities for seeing a few species that can be hard to find at Kinabalu itself. We will hope for such species, including the endemic Bornean and Mountain barbets, Bornean Bulbul, Fruit-hunter, Whitehead's Spiderhunter, Whitehead's Broadbill, Pygmy White-eye, and Bornean Leafbird. We've had

intermittent good luck with most of these specialties, plus such gems as Long-tailed Broadbill, which are not found on the mountain. We'll also make a detour up Gunung Alab, a smaller peak that has proved to be a fairly reliable spot for Mountain Black-eye and Pale-faced Bulbul – two species that can sometimes be a challenge to find at Mt. Kinabalu. Only 60 kms (a bit more than 35 miles) from Kota Kinabalu, the range provides some great birding en route to Kinabalu Park.



The spectacular Whitehead's Broadbill is an endemic we'll seek on the slopes of Mt. Kinabalu. Photograph by participant Rafael Lovas.

Kinabalu Park, Sabah's oldest park, protects 290 square miles (754 square kms or 186,000 acres) around its dramatic centerpiece, Mt. Kinabalu. At 13,455 feet (4100m), it is the highest peak between the Himalayas and New Guinea. A gigantic granite monolith—its bald, jagged crown shaped by glaciers during the last Ice Age—Mt. Kinabalu is a geologically young mountain; it is still growing at an estimated rate of five millimeters a year. Its towering presence dominates the landscape, indeed creating its own weather, and has understandably been significant to local people for a long time, being regarded as an abode of spirits by the Kadazan/Dusun people. Its name is generally thought to derive from the Dusun "Aki Nabalu," meaning "Sacred Place of the Dead."

The vegetation on the flanks of Kinabalu comprises one of the richest and most remarkable assemblages of plants in the world. There are three main types of forest on the mountain itself: montane oak forest from the park entrance at 5200 (1580m) to about 6500 feet (1980m); mossy cloud forest from there to 8700 feet (2650m); and then stunted forest with many mosses, ferns, and bamboos to the treeline at about 11,000 feet (3350m). In each zone, there are examples of western plants of Himalayan/Chinese origin meeting eastern ones from Australasia; there is even a tiny plant on the summit, *Oreomyrrhis andicola*, believed to have very close New World affinities. There are eight species of pitcher-plants, 26 rhododendrons, and more than 850 orchids (including the world's largest) in the park.

Mt. Kinabalu is the center of distribution for essentially all of the montane birds of Borneo, including a majority of the island's endemics. At the lower elevations (5200 to 6200 feet; 1585-1900m; the elevation range that we will be birding while here), there is access to extensive oak forest along roads and trails within walking distance of the trailhead to the climb up the mountain. Here we'll search for such endemics as Red-breasted and Crimson-headed partridges, the beautiful Whitehead's Trogon, Golden-naped Barbet, the spectacular big Whitehead's Broadbill, Mountain Wren-Babbler, Bornean Stubtail, Bornean Whistler, Bornean Whistling-Thrush, the rare and little-known Everett's Thrush, Bornean Green-Magpie (split from Short-tailed Magpie), Bornean Treepie, Bornean Forktail, Bornean Shortwing, Penan Bulbul, Fruit-hunter, Chestnut-crested Yuhina, Black-sided Flowerpecker, Chestnut-hooded Laughingthrush, the scarce and distinctive Whitehead's Spiderhunter, and the strange, bald-headed Bare-headed Laughingthrush. Other interesting birds include Sunda Cuckoo, Mountain Scops-Owl, the endemic Bornean race of Sunda Owlet, Maroon, Checker-throated, and Orange-backed woodpeckers, Hair-crested Drongo, Sunda Cuckooshrike, Snowy-browed and Indigo flycatchers, Velvet-

fronted Nuthatch, Black-capped White-eye, Mountain Leaf Warbler, Yellow-breasted Warbler, Aberrant Bush-Warbler, Sunda Laughingthrush, Temminck's Babbler, and Temminck's Sunbird.

Kinabalu's avian and botanical wealth is echoed in other aspects of its natural history. There are a number of mammals endemic to the mountains of Borneo, including several restricted to the slopes of Mt. Kinabalu itself. Among the endemics we could see here are Mountain Treeshrew, Kinabalu and Jentink's squirrels, Bornean Mountain Ground-Squirrel, and Whitehead's Pygmy-Squirrel.

On one afternoon, we'll descend to Poring Springs, on the mountain's eastern flank. At an elevation of only 500 meters (about 1500 feet), this area gives us another chance to pick up lowland species we may have missed elsewhere: Rufous-collared Kingfisher, Bornean, Long-billed, Spectacled and Yellow-eared spiderhunters, Red-throated, Yellow-crowned, Gold-whiskered and Brown barbets, Asian Fairy Bluebird, and Crested Jayshrike. But our chief reason for visiting is the chance to see *Rafflesia keithi*, one of the largest flowers in the world. The genus *Rafflesia* is one of the rarest plant genera on earth. Entirely parasitic, its species lack leaves, stems, and roots. Instead, its seedlings attach by suckers to the trailing stems of a single genus of wild grape vine, from which it draws its nutrients as an endoparasite. The only visible part of its life cycle appears when it is ready to reproduce. A tiny bud swells to the size of a volleyball before the unisexual flower opens, spreading five petals that look rather like dead meat and smell like rotting flesh. The putrid odor attracts bluebottle flies, which *may* pollinate it *if* they have visited a simultaneously blooming flower of the opposite sex—a rare occurrence, given the paucity of the flowers and their short life span. (The flies themselves receive no reward, having been deceived.) After a short few days, the flower rots, the fertile females producing fruits with minute seeds that are eaten and dispersed by small squirrels and treeshrews, only occasionally landing on the proper host. No wonder the flower is so rare!



The Bornean Green-Magpie is endemic to the mountains of northern Borneo. This is one of three birds seen on one of our 2026 tours. Photograph by participant Maureen Phair.

Itinerary for Borneo

Days 1-3. Flights from the US to Kota Kinabalu to Sandakan. Plan to arrive in Sandakan to the Sabah Hotel in time for a good night's sleep on Day 3. We recommend going into Sandakan early and staying an extra night if possible. The group will meet at 3:45 p.m. on Day 3 for a brief orientation, to pre-order our early dinner, and then for some light birding on the grounds and along the nearby road. If you'd rather rest, we'll meet you in the hotel's restaurant at 5:00 p.m. for dinner. The reason for our early dinner is that we will then continue on to an optional night outing at the Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Center. It is a particularly good place to look for Tarsier and Red Gian Flying Squirrel, as well as some other nocturnal critters. Night at Sabah Hotel.



The canopy walkway at the Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Center is a wonderful way to experience the tropical forests of Borneo. We'll be able to get views of many amazing birds and other creatures. Photograph by guide Rose Ann Rowlett.

Day 4. Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Center to Sukau. We'll arrange for a 5:30 a.m. breakfast this morning before heading out into the field (with our luggage packed in the bus). We'll head directly to the nearby Sepilok Rainforest Discovery Center, the main draw of which is a fabulous canopy walkway—surely one of the sturdiest ever built! A morning in the canopy and along the trails below will provide us a wonderful introduction to birds of Borneo's lowland tropical rainforest. Wide metal stairways climb to high sheltered metal towers connected by a (lower) wide metal walkway through the canopy. The vistas and early morning light are lovely, but activity can wane by mid-morning, making it important to start early. We'll plan to spend the productive morning hours watching activity develop, before heading to lunch. After lunch, we'll travel by road to Sukau. Time and weather permitting, we'll detour to visit the fascinating Gomantong Caves this afternoon, taking the boardwalk (if it is open to visitation) into the "black-nest cave" and staying until 6 p.m., hoping to watch the exodus of Wrinkle-lipped Free-tailed Bats. For this adventure, you'll want your flashlight (for the cave), as well as your umbrella; you never know what the weather in the rainforest will be, especially in the afternoon. If we stay for the bats, we won't reach Sukau Rainforest Lodge until after dark. Reaching our lodge involves driving to the boat dock at Sukau (some 45 minutes from Gomantong) and taking a 10-minute boat ride to the lodge, where we'll be greeted with dinner and an orientation session. We should sleep in comfort tonight, with a chorus of frogs and insects just outside our windows.

The lodgings at Sukau Rainforest Lodge have been recently renovated and are wonderfully comfortable, offering spacious rooms, private, hot-water bathrooms, air-conditioning, and screened windows with views of the forest. Drinking water is supplied in your room, and you can refill your canteen anytime from big bottles of drinking water in the lobby and restaurant. We'll enjoy delicious Malaysian food in a festive atmosphere right on the Kinabatangan River, and we'll bird from boats with quiet, electric motors—a real plus for birding! Night at Sukau Rainforest Lodge.

Days 5-7. Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary. We'll start with an exploration of a nearby tributary, doing most of our birding by boat helmed by a sharp-eyed boatman and a local guide. You'll want to have your rubber boots with you on our various boat trips, as you may need to land for a rest stop, and the mud along the rivers may quite sticky (depending on water levels). You'll also want your rain gear handy (including an umbrella) and you'll need sunglasses for the glare of a bright tropical sky over water. We anticipate doing cruises on the Kinabatangan and its tributaries early morning, late afternoon, and on at least one of our evenings at Sukau; exactly how we orchestrate our time will depend upon anticipated weather conditions. Having four nights here should ensure we have some good-weather time for cruises, including time to search for any recently reported Bornean Pygmy Elephants. In between early cruises and lunchtime, or if rain should interfere with our planned boat trips, we'll bird on foot along the covered Sukau boardwalk trail as well. On at least one of our mornings, we'll explore the well-developed secondary forest along the Gomantong Caves entrance road. This little-traveled road offers access to rich forest, full of birds. Nights at Sukau Rainforest Lodge.



The Bornean Crested Fireback is a large pheasant that we'll watch for in the Danum Valley. Photograph by participant Ruch Spisak.

Day 8. Sukau to Danum Valley. After a final breakfast at Sukau, we'll head to the Gomantong Caves road again for a few hours and then depart for Lahad Datu, which is located on the coast 1.5-2 hours south of Sukau. There, we'll have lunch and then visit the office of Borneo Rainforest Lodge, where we'll get some background information on the Danum Valley Conservation Area, a logging concession managed by the state of Sabah. Then we'll load into vehicles from the lodge for the 3 to 3.5-hour drive over (mostly) gravel logging roads to our lodge, which is located in the heart of a reserve of pristine rainforest nestled amid selectively logged woodland.

The lovely Borneo Rainforest Lodge, where each chalet has a beautiful interior, air conditioning and a private balcony, will be our home for the next four nights. We'll arrive in time to get into our cabins and shop for leech socks before heading to dinner. Night at Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley.

Days 9-11. Borneo Rainforest Lodge. We'll have four mornings (and four nights!) to bird the entrance road, the canopy walkway, and the less rugged trails within this lovely forest reserve. Our usual routine will be early breakfasts, birding on foot for a long morning (sometimes including the canopy platforms, where one can sit on a bench for awhile), then back to the lodge for lunch. We *highly recommend* a lightweight folding stool for the extensive amount of trail birding here; the chance to sit while we're working on skulkers not only rests the back, but makes it comfortable to be still and patient—and it often gives one a great viewing hole into the forest without having to crouch. Of course, you'll want to be prepared for rain and for some hilly climbing; if you use a walking stick, there's some good terrain for it here. We'll plan easy afternoons, with a good break for a nap after lunch, a little exploration on one's own, and/or some easy birding from the veranda or nearby; birding right around the lodge can be delightful—and keep us from getting caught too far afield when the afternoon rains commence. We'll have (delicious!) dinners at the lodge and, sometimes before and sometimes after dinner, optional night drives that usually last an hour to an hour-and-a-half. These night drives are offered by the lodge on a nightly basis, guided by an experienced spotlighter who sits high in a vehicle adapted for seating multiple ecotourists. The list of mammal, bird, and frog possibilities is long indeed, and we've had some great luck with them, with sightings ranging from File-eared, Harlequin, and Wallace's flying frogs and three species of flying squirrels to a confiding family of Brown Wood-Owls, a calling Reddish Scops-Owl, and a prowling Leopard Cat. The riches of the ancient rainforest here could easily prove some of the greatest of the trip! Nights at Borneo Rainforest Lodge, Danum Valley.

Day 12. Danum Valley to Kota Kinabalu. Today, we'll travel back to Lahad Datu with a packed lunch, arriving in time for our flight of about an hour back to Kota Kinabalu. The drive should take about 2.5 hours. The flight to Kota Kinabalu should take about an hour. Depending on our flight schedule, we may have time to do some birding along the coast before checking into our Kota Kinabalu hotel. Night in Kota Kinabalu.

Day 13. Crocker Range Park; to Kinabalu Park. We plan an early (5:00 a.m.) start, with a boxed breakfast from our hotel, in order to reach good habitat in the Crocker Range while there is good activity. It's a bit more than 35 miles (about 60 km) to a good stretch of habitat, where we'll spend the best part of the morning. The highway transects Crocker Range Park, but there is little access to areas away from the road. We'll bird the forest from the road edge and at the Gunung Alab sector of the park (where we hope to find the highland endemic Mountain Black-eye) for much of the morning.

After a nearby restaurant lunch, we'll head for Kinabalu Park, descending into the Tambunan valley and then heading northeast toward Ranau via a picturesque road with views of both the extensive Crocker Range and, eventually, Gunung (Mt.) Kinabalu itself, looming in the distance. We should reach our hotel, at an elevation of about 5300 feet by dinnertime. Night near Kinabalu National Park.



The small Mountain Black-eye is endemic to the higher elevations of northern Borneo; we'll look for them on Mt Kinabalu and in the Crocker Range. Photograph by participant Russ Cole.

Days 14-16. Kinabalu Park. We have three-and-a-half days to explore the forests of Mount Kinabalu. It will be pleasantly cool here, especially at night and at dawn, when we should have some fine views toward the mountain. While at the park, we'll have a number of options and some very focused en emic birding. At the lower elevations—from the park entrance at about 5300 feet (1600m) up to 6300 feet (1900m)—there are some wonderful birds to be seen along the paved road up the mountain. (The Summit Trail, which accesses the higher habitats, is no longer available to day-hikers in the park, which means the Friendly Bush-Warbler is no longer possible on this tour.) We'll probably begin in this area and then enter some of the less difficult trails through the extensive montane oak-dipterocarp forest if the day becomes sunny and warm. We'll use a van or bus for transport to some of the trailheads in the park, sometimes walking back to lunch at the centrally located Liwagu Restaurant and sometimes lunching at restaurants a short distance from the park. The covered patio of the Liwagu restaurant is a lovely, birdy place to hang out in case of rain. Our afternoon activities will depend on the combination of weather and what we've seen and what we haven't. We plan to drive down to Poring Hot Springs one afternoon, primarily for a look for a blooming *Rafflesia*. Nights near Kinabalu National Park.

Day 17. Kinabalu Park; afternoon return to Kota Kinabalu. We have a final full morning to focus on finding whatever Kinabalu species may have eluded us until now. After lunch, we'll load up and head for KK, which is about two hours away by direct driving. We may stop by some marshes or rivers en route in hopes of a few waterbirds, but we plan to get to our hotel in time to clean up and repack before our farewell dinner at the hotel restaurant. Night in Kota Kinabalu.

Day 18. Departure (flights homeward). You can depart Kota Kinabalu at any time today; breakfast is included in the price of your room. Our Malaysian operator will confirm our flights and advise us as to when we should be ready for our transfers to the airport. Safe travels!

About Your Guides

Tour I:

Doug Gochfeld was born and raised in Brooklyn, NY, and his interest in birds was sparked at a young age (he participated in his first CBC at the age of 7), in part by his father. This interest soon spiraled into a full-blown obsession for Doug for a few years before he abruptly shelved it, in favor of baseball, for several adolescent years. He picked up his interest in birds again in college and once again became a dedicated/obsessed birder.

*"**Doug** kept everyone in mind for getting to see the birds, we enjoyed the time with him, and we really appreciated this daily eBird lists with detailed, interesting commentary/notes. Doug's eBird reports are a treasure!" B.M., Vietnam*

For several years before starting to lead a full slate of tours for Field Guides in 2016, he traveled extensively as a working birder. These field jobs have included guiding on St. Paul Island, in Alaska's Pribilof Islands, for parts of four years, and multiple seasons spent monitoring migration at the legendary migration hotspots of Cape May, New Jersey, and Eilat in Israel (this last as recently as 2016). While in Eilat, he was able to thoroughly explore the southern part of the country, which is where his strong bond with desert landscapes originated. Doug is excited to share this love and appreciation of the desert spectacles with all those who accompany him to this part of the world.

Doug is a Leica Pro Staff member, and he has been a regular leader at birding festivals in Texas, Ohio, Florida, New Mexico, and Virginia. He has worked in Alaska, Suriname, and Brazil studying the breeding and wintering ecology of shorebirds, which hold a special place in his heart. His strongest interests in birding are migration, vagrancy, and patterns of distribution, and he's always excited to share his enthusiasm in, and knowledge of, these subjects and much more on his tours, whether close to home or halfway around the world.

Tour II:

Megan Edwards Crewe has been birding since childhood, when she discovered she could have her father all to herself (rather than sharing him with her brothers and sisters) if she was willing to get up very early on Saturdays and tramp around the woods in search of birds. After graduating with a degree in biology from Purdue University, she sampled an impressive variety of jobs before discovering Field Guides. Since joining the company more than two decades ago, Megan—who brims with information and enthusiasm—has delighted in sharing the wonders and adventures of birding and the natural world with participants.

*This was our 4th trip with **Megan**. We enjoy her sense of humor and people skills. She is organized, very knowledgeable, worked hard to get everyone on the birds, and worked well with our local guides to give us the best experience she could. She also gives good hugs! K.C., Borneo*

One unexpected bonus of the job has been meeting her British husband Mike, with whom she co-led a trip to France in 2000. They've bounced back and forth across the Atlantic since then, and are now settled in a small coastal village in Norfolk, England, where they're enjoying long walks around their "local patch" and slowly converting their half-acre garden into a wildlife refuge. She has led ten previous Borneo tours.

Visit https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/ for complete tour schedules for Doug and Megan; just click on a photo to see more.

Financial Information

FEE: $11,795 from Sandakan
SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): $1650 (Singles near Kinabalu National Park may have shared bathrooms)
DEPOSIT: $1175 per person
FINAL PAYMENT DUE: Tour I: October 2, 2026 Tour II: December 17, 2026
LIMIT: 8

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Karen Turner. Karen will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

ACCOMMODATIONS: Our hotel in Sandakan is a nice hotel with air conditioning in the rooms and good food. In Kota Kinabalu, our base is another good hotel, only 25 minutes from the airport and complete with high-speed internet connection and satellite TV. Once in the "wilds" of Borneo, we'll be based in comfortable accommodations, each with private hot-water showers, and located right in the birding areas. Sukau Rainforest Lodge, on the Kinabatangan River, is a lovely river-edge lodge, about 10 minutes by boat from the dock. It offers good food and birding, air conditioning and quiet ceiling fans in recently renovated, spacious rooms. With lovely chalets on stilts set right at the edge of the forest, the fabulous Borneo Rainforest Lodge in Danum Valley is a "must" for birders. It offers terrific food, ceiling fans, air conditioning, a small refrigerator, and exceptionally good service. Singles in Kinabalu National Park may require shared bathrooms.

AIR ARRANGEMENTS: The tour begins in Sandakan (Sandakan Airport, SDK) and ends in Kota Kinabalu (Kota Kinabalu International Airport, BKI).

Arrival: Sandakan, by afternoon, Day 3. The airport in Sandakan is a domestic airport, so you will need to transit through Kuala Lumpur or Kota Kinabalu to reach Sandakan. There are multiple flights from the US to get you to Kuala Lumpur or Kota Kinabalu, where you can connect with a flight to Sandakan. *Note that some leave the US in the wee hours of the morning*. Karen Turner, our tour manager for Borneo, can help you select the flights which will work best for you.

Departure: Kota Kinabalu, any time Day 18.

DOCUMENTS: Be sure to verify the latest entry requirements for each country you will visit or transit.

Passport: A current passport is required for international travel. It should be in good condition, valid for at least 6 months beyond your return date, and have at least one blank page for each country on your itinerary.

Arrivals Card: As of January 2024, Malaysia requires all foreigners to register for a Malaysia Digital Arrivals Card (MDAC) before visiting. This must be done within three days of your arrival into the country. To apply, visit the government's website at https://imigresen-online.imi.gov.my/mdac/main.

If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Malaysian consulate (Sabah is part of Malaysia) nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online, or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify their policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether the flights are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility. Please check the weight limit for carry-ons on your international flight; some airlines are quite strict about it.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere. Smoking in vehicles is prohibited.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The tour fee is $11,795 for one person in double occupancy from Sandakan. It includes all lodging from Day 3 through Day 17, all meals from dinner on Day 3 through breakfast on Day 18, all ground

transportation, entrance fees, and the guide services of the tour leader. Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Borneo, airport taxes, visa fees, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, any alcoholic beverages, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for the tour is $1650 for those requesting a single room. (Singles may have shared bathrooms in Kinabalu National Park). If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; however, if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please submit your deposit of $1175 per person; see https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/ for our Payment Options. **Full payment of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or by Tour I: October 2, 2026, Tour II: December 17, 2026.** We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and full payment, less $100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the full tour fee is non-refundable, which would include the full deposit if the final payment has not yet been paid. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non- transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to protect your investment in case of injury or illness to you or an immediate family member before or during a trip. Because we must remit early and substantial deposits to our suppliers, we cannot offer refunds for cancellations outside of our Cancellation Policy. If a participant is unable to join or continue a tour due to illness, all related expenses will be their responsibility, and no refunds can be issued for missed days. Please wait to purchase insurance until we notify you that the tour is confirmed to operate, as most policies are non-refundable.

For full details, visit our Trip Cancellation Insurance page at https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only

as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

MEC—7/24
Peg 9/24; updated 9/24
DDG – 7/25; peg 9/25