

## **Trip report: Langkawi, Malaysia (08/01/2018 - 12/01/2018)**

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There are certain species of birds that can only be found around the Langkawi archipelago within the political boundaries of Malaysia. For birders that are not particular about their passport status when observing a bird, Langkawi might not be a key destination since the species assemblage is not particularly unique from a biogeographical perspective. That being said, the island is a nice site for a short and simple trip and the pristine forest of Gunung Raya is home to a nice density of hornbills. This report puts together details from my independently arranged and comparatively relaxed birding trip to Langkawi with my partner.

### **Main Locations Birded**

Langkawi



*Great Hornbill at Gunung Raya, Langkawi*

## **Planning the trip**

eBird records and “The 100 Best Bird Watching Sites in Southeast Asia” by Yong Ding Li and Low Bing Wen were useful in getting details about the rough sites to visit. I am also grateful to Sofian Zack for providing us information about some places within the island for birding (check out his café [Hornbill Hut Langkawi](#)). We otherwise just randomly drove around productive looking places based on Google satellite view.

Field Guide used: Robson, C. (2014). Field guide to the birds of South-East Asia. Bloomsbury Publishing.

## **General Logistics**

### Language

English was widely spoken and language was not much of an issue.

### Food

Plenty of food choices were available at the town area of the island near the airport (southeast region). There were roadside stalls at the immediate vicinity of Gunung Raya where we packed food to eat on the mountain.

### Guide

We birded the island independently but met Wendy Chin ([Langkawi Nature Guide](#)) at Gunung Raya on one evening. She had a very friendly demeanour and pointed out a Brown Boobook to us as we drove past later that night even though she had clients with her.

## **Transport**

Langkawi can be accessed via ferry from Kuala Perlis along the western coast of Peninsula Malaysia, but we took a direct flight from Singapore instead as it was more time and cost efficient.

We rented the cheapest car available from Big Thumb Car Rental. I had to seek assistance from a Malaysian friend to book the vehicle because they required a deposit to be bank transferred, which could only be done from a local bank account. The vehicle was handed over with near empty tank, an extremely frustrating but typical tactic used by many car rental companies. The car struggled when climbing Gunung Raya at some of the steeper sections, but the experience was otherwise fine.

Google Maps worked well for navigation within the island.

## **Accommodation**

8 – 12 January

*ZEN Rooms Kedawang*

Booked via booking.com, convenient despite being away from the more developed (and touristy) area further south. Also located slightly nearer to the birding sites.

## **Birding**

### **Cenang Fields**

The field behind [Bon Ton Resort](#) (GPS: 6.310318, 99.719283) had grasslands, wetlands and many gentle cows. The site is apparently a good place to look for Oriental Pratincoles in winter but we did not see any, although we did find typical waders including **Pacific Golden Plover**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Lesser Sand Plover**, **Common Sandpiper**, **Pin-tailed/Swinhoe's Snipe** and other waterbirds such as **Little Cormorant**, **Grey-headed Swamphen** and **Baillon's Crake**. We had brief views of a flushed quail but could not tell if it was a true quail (if so, likely a Blue-breasted Quail) or a Barred Buttonquail, although probably the former. Several **Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters** were present at the entrance of the field as well.

We also randomly drove around the roads through the paddyfields east of Bon Ton Resort (around GPS: 6.306003, 99.731094 and the general area visible on satellite view) where waterbirds including **Red-wattled Lapwing**, **Little Ringed Plover**, **Wood Sandpiper**, **Cinnamon Bittern** and **Purple Heron**, as well as grassland birds including **Scaly-breasted Munia** and **Baya Weaver** were present. We also witnessed a nice flyby of ~200 **Lesser Whistling Ducks** on one of the evenings.

A brief visit to a small pond at the northern end of Jalan Kedawang (GPS: 6.334608, 99.734344) yielded **Little Grebe**, **White-browed Crake** and **White-breasted Waterhen**.

### **Geo Eco Adventures**

We obtained poor views of the **Brown-winged Kingfisher** along Jalan Temoyong (GPS: 6.282892, 99.748237) near our accommodation on the first evening of our trip but were not satisfied. A brief visit to Kilim Geoforest Park (GPS: 6.405083, 99.857384) on one late morning by walking around the short mangrove boardwalk was also unsuccessful. We eventually managed to get good views of the kingfisher at Geo Eco Adventures (GPS: 6.398941, 99.727822).



*Brown-winged Kingfisher*

### **Seven Falls Waterfall**

We visited the Seven Falls Waterfall area on one night and night birded along the well paved path leading to the waterfall (GPS: 6.378115, 99.673662). Ear birding was impossible near the waterfall itself. Along the path we heard two **Oriental Bay Owls** as well as **Sunda Scops Owls**. The former species is one that is notoriously difficult to see, often perched low to the ground in dense areas. Our experience attests to this reputation.

### **Datai area**

We drove the long journey to the furthest accessible area along Jalan Teluk Datai (GPS: 6.422330, 99.665611). There was a well-marked trail leading into the forest from this area where we saw a **Puff-throated Babbler**. We also birded along the road and found **Asian Red-eyed Bulbul**, **Asian Fairy-bluebird** and **Thick-billed Green Pigeons**. Here we also saw migrants including **Mugimaki** and **Green-backed Flycatcher** (the latter apparently being only Langkawi's second record, although definitely attributable to the general scarcity of birders on the island). We also visited Datai Bay (GPS: 6.433550, 99.692022) and had close encounters with a very friendly **Pacific Reef Heron**.

### Kisap Area

We parked around GPS: 6.364773, 99.875154 and randomly walked the rubber plantation (road along GPS: 6.363418, 99.869506 + the general area) in hope to find the Black-hooded Oriole. This is apparently the best site to find this species in Langkawi but we only had a consolation **Greater Coucal**.

### Lubok Semilang

Carpark GPS: 6.363958, 99.791322. We visited this well-forested site at the foot of Gunung Raya on two afternoons. A paved trail along a stream lead into the forest and eventually to a staircase. The stairs apparently ascend Gunung Raya and we only climbed an extremely slight portion of it. Bird activity was not particularly high, but we did find nice species including **Cook's Swift**, **Brown-backed Needletails** and **Banded Kingfisher**.



*Banded Kingfisher*

### Gunung Raya

Gunung Raya was our most productive site in Langkawi and much of our time was spent here. We slowly drove and along the single ~13km long road from GPS: 6.381786, 99.782081 to the summit and stopped at sites that seemed productive. This is apparently a good place to find the only Trogon in Langkawi, Orange-breasted Trogon, but we did not see any.

Along the road we found many **Greater Racket-tailed Drongos** and at fruiting and flowering trees, **Asian Red-eyed Bulbuls**, **Orange-bellied Flowerpeckers**, **Ruby-throated Sunbirds** and **Asian Fairy-bluebirds**. A **Crested Serpent Eagle** perched on a lamppost along the way up and we also saw a **Greater Flameback** here.

The highlight of our trip was a massive fruiting tree at GPS: 6.385043, 99.790703 where **Great Wreathed** and **Oriental Pied Hornbills** feasted. The birds panicked and took flight every time a resident **Mountain Hawk-eagle** soared by, even though they were much bigger and were feeding in a flock exceeding 60. From the same site we also got to observe a group of **Great Slaty Woodpeckers** exhibiting some form of social behaviour.



*Great Slaty Woodpecker*

We also drove the mountain at night and heard **Sunda Scops Owls** and **Brown Hawk-owls** (of which, one was seen thanks to Wendy). **Oriental Bay Owls** were again present but attempting to find one was difficult because the forests could not be bushwhacked without either climbing up a steep cliff or tumbling down the mountain. My partner managed to get photographs of one from the car when we stopped to inspect a haunting loud call turned out to be from a bird that was PERCHED JUST BESIDE OUR VEHICLE. From the driver's seat I was only able to see a bunch of leaves and the rufous wings. The darn bird flushed as I released the brake pedals to inch forward. Such is birding, but the drive was still quite exciting as we saw multiple Small-toothed Palm Civets and one massive Reticulated Python.

## Systematic List of Birds

95 species seen, 8 heard only

Nomenclature and taxonomy follows Gill F, D Donsker & P Rasmussen (Eds). 2020. IOC World Bird List (v10.1). doi : 10.14344/IOC.ML.10.1.

1 = Seen, HO = Heard Only

No	English Name	Latin Name	Langkawi
1	Lesser Whistling Duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	1
2	Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>	1
3	Cook's Swift	<i>Apus cooki</i>	1
4	House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>	1
5	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	1
6	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopaceus</i>	HO
7	Little Bronze Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx minutillus</i>	HO
8	Rusty-breasted Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sepulcralis</i>	HO
9	Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>	1
10	Large Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx sparverioides</i>	1
11	Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	1
12	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelia chinensis</i>	1
13	Zebra Dove	<i>Geopelia striata</i>	1
14	Pink-necked Green Pigeon	<i>Treron vernans</i>	1
15	Thick-billed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>	1
16	Green Imperial Pigeon	<i>Ducula aenea</i>	1
17	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	1
18	Baillon's Crake	<i>Porzana pusilla</i>	1
19	White-browed Crake	<i>Porzana cinerea</i>	1
20	Grey-headed Swampphen	<i>Porphyrio poliocephalus</i>	1
21	Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	1
22	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	1
23	Pacific Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	1
24	Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	1
25	Lesser Sand Plover	<i>Charadrius mongolus</i>	1
26	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1
27	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	1
28	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>	1
29	Yellow Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	1
30	Cinnamon Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	1
31	Striated Heron	<i>Butorides striata</i>	1
32	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus coromandus</i>	1
33	Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	1
34	Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	1
35	Intermediate Egret	<i>Ardea intermedia</i>	1
36	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	1
37	Pacific Reef Heron	<i>Egretta sacra</i>	1
38	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	1
39	Changeable Hawk-Eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatus</i>	1
40	Mountain Hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus nipalensis</i>	1

41	Crested Goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>	1
42	Japanese Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter gularis</i>	1
43	Brahminy Kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	1
44	White-bellied Sea Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	1
45	Oriental Bay Owl	<i>Phodilus badius</i>	1
46	Sunda Scops Owl	<i>Otus lempiji</i>	HO
47	Brown Hawk-owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>	1
48	Great Hornbill	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>	1
49	Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>	1
50	Wreathed Hornbill	<i>Rhyticeros undulatus</i>	1
51	Oriental Dollarbird	<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	1
52	Banded Kingfisher	<i>Lacedo pulchella</i>	1
53	Brown-winged Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis amauroptera</i>	1
54	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	1
55	Collared Kingfisher	<i>Todiramphus chloris</i>	1
56	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>	1
57	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater	<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	1
58	Laced Woodpecker	<i>Picus vittatus</i>	1
59	Common Flameback	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>	1
60	Greater Flameback	<i>Chrysocolaptes guttacristatus</i>	1
61	Great Slaty Woodpecker	<i>Mulleripicus pulverulentus</i>	1
62	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	1
63	Green Iora	<i>Aegithina viridissima</i>	HO
64	Ashy Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus divaricatus</i>	1
65	Brown Shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	1
66	Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	1
67	Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	1
68	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	1
69	Black-Naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	1
70	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	1
71	Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>	1
72	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	1
73	Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>	1
74	Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>	1
75	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	1
76	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	1
77	Rufous-Bellied Swallow	<i>Cecropis badia</i>	1
78	Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	1
79	Oriental Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus orientalis</i>	HO
80	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	HO
81	Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>	1
82	Ashy Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>	1
83	Pin-striped Tit-Babbler	<i>Macronus gularis</i>	1
84	Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	1
85	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	1
86	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	1
87	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	1
88	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	1

89	Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	1
90	Green-backed Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula elisae</i>	1
91	Mugimaki Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula mugimaki</i>	1
92	Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>	1
93	Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	<i>Chalcoparia singalensis</i>	1
94	Brown-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>	1
95	Van Hasselt's Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma brasiliana</i>	1
96	Olive-backed Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris jugularis</i>	1
97	Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	HO
98	Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	1
99	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	1
100	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	1
101	White-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura maja</i>	1
102	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	1
103	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	1
104*	Pin-tailed/Swinhoe's Snipe	<i>Gallinago sp.</i>	1