

**Trip report: Kubah and Borneo Highlands, Borneo, Malaysia
(04/07/2018 - 10/07/2018)**

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A good friend of mine had a conference to attend in the town of Kuching, Sarawak, so a few of us decided to join him for a quick birding session in Kubah National Park. Together with my partner, I also visited Borneo Highlands and Semenggoh Nature Reserve very briefly. The overall trip was disappointing from a birding perspective but I decided to write a short document about it anyway since there seems to be a general scarcity of independent reports to this area (although probably because none of them are key birding tour sites for Borneo).

Main Locations Birded

Kubah National Park

Semenggoh Nature Reserve

Borneo Highlands



Black-and-yellow Broadbill at Borneo Highlands

Itinerary

4 July	Arrive in Kuching Evening birding at Semenggoh (2 pax)
5 July	Meet up, travel to Kubah National Park (5 pax)
6 July	Birding Kubah National Park
7 July	Birding Kubah National Park
8 July	Birding Kubah National Park
9 July	Birding Borneo Highlands (2 pax)
10 July	Birding Borneo Highlands
11 July	Got too bored, visited the Cat Museum in Kuching Depart Kuching

Planning the trip

“The 100 Best Bird Watching Sites in Southeast Asia” by Yong Ding Li and Low Bing Wen provided a rough idea of the general birding sites. [Orenstein et al. \(2010\)](#) also gave an overview of Sarawak birding, although most of them were about areas inconvenient from Kuching. I also contacted the Borneo Highlands resort at enquiry [at] borneohighlands.com.my for information regarding access.

Field Guide used: Eaton, J. A., van Balen, S., Brickle, N. W., & Rheindt, F. E. (2016). Birds of the Indonesian Archipelago: Greater Sundas and Wallacea. Lynx.

General Logistics

Language

English was well spoken at the areas we visited and communication was not an issue.

Transport

We used the Uber ride-hailing app to get to Kubah National Park and booked a vehicle for the Semenggoh and Borneo Highlands section only. It was a little difficult to book an Uber *out* of Kubah National Park because of the remote location but we managed to get a ride after about 15 minutes.

Our first vehicle was booked at easybook.com from the Jajago Travel Services rental company. The vehicle itself was alright but was rented to us with one bar of fuel left – a typical technique employed by rental companies. Our second vehicle was booked, also via the same website, from THM Kuching Car Rental and was fine.

Accommodation

4 – 5 July: Hotel Fairlane Inn, Kuching

Booked via agoda.com. A fantastic place to stay if you want to fall sick.

5 – 8 July: Kubah National Park

The chalets at Kubah National Park can be [booked online](#). We booked the “Forest Lodge Type 4” – super spacious for five people – for three nights and the total cost was 675RM. The chalet was equipped with shower and washroom, air conditioning and a kitchen.

8 – 9 July: R&R Haven Guesthouse

Booked via booking.com. Quite nice and at a relatively convenient location from Borneo Highlands. No nearby eateries but there was an electric kettle where we could boil water for instant food and drinks. It was quite chilly at night.

9 – 10 July: Merdeka Guest House

Booked via agoda.com.

Food

Food choices were aplenty within the town of Kuching even until late at night.

There were no food stalls at Kubah National Park at all, so we stocked up three days’ worth of food at a supermarket (Giant, GPS: 1.582307, 110.331642) before heading there. Water could be boiled at the chalet kitchen.

Food choices also got limited away from Kuching and were near absent within the immediate vicinity of our accommodation for the Borneo Highlands section. We hence stocked up food before heading there as well. There was a restaurant within the Borneo Highlands compound but we just brought snacks up instead.

Birding

Semenggoh Nature Reserve

We only spent a short evening at this site (parking: 1.400152, 110.324594). This nature reserve is known for rehabilitating Orangutans and also for the [Long-billed Partridge](#) that was reliable many years back but we of course saw neither. Entrance was free since we did not sign up for the walks and we mainly just birded the main road and a short side trail. Apart from a pair of nice **Red-throated Barbets** and a **Common Hill Myna**, we also got great views and an impressive vocal performance from a **(Bornean) Black Magpie**.



Black Magpie

We were hoping to night bird the area but it was closed after dinner, so we instead visited a roadside trail at GPS: 1.334867, 110.304435. Apart from meeting a local collecting some herbs (?) and a group of teenage boys enjoying off-road biking, we just had heard only encounters with **Sunda** and **Reddish Scops Owls** here.

Kubah National Park

It was very windy during the first two days of our visit and this caused bird activity to be pathetic, with decent birding only possible on our final morning. We birded mainly along the main trail from the Park HQ (where the accommodation also was) to the frog pond and slightly beyond. We also visited the waterfall trail (apparently a reliable site for Blue-banded Pitta but we drew blank) and Selang trail once each. We were allowed to freely walk around both in the day and at night, but regulations regarding night walks has apparently changed since my visit (I am not very certain regarding details about this). 2.5 days was overkill for this site. It felt especially long because the birding was really crappy but thankfully the company was marvellous.



Selang trail

We walked this trail once with the hope of getting evening flybys from the “view point” indicated in the map. We were betrayed and were instead offered a hilariously short viewing platform that only provided views of the trees within 10m radius. On the bright side, we found a pair of **Grey-chested Jungle Flycatchers** here.



Grey-chested Jungle Flycatcher



Main road

Babblers of several species were common throughout the park such as **Rufous-crowned**, **Scaly-crowned**, **Rufous-fronted** and **Sooty-capped**. We had slightly fewer **Chestnut-winged** and **Short-tailed Babblers** and saw just one **Black-capped** (multiple heard, but not a particularly easy bird to get good views of). At wet areas there were **Chestnut-naped Forktails**. We encountered the **Bornean Blue Flycatcher** several times and saw them once around GPS: 1.607604, 110.193055 and once more around the entrance of the Rayu trail. There was also a **Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher** around the frog pond (the “default” morph of this species in Borneo is the white morph). Slightly beyond the entrance to the waterfall trail we had eye level views of a **Banded Kingfisher**. We heard a **Blue-banded Pitta** as well but were not hardcore enough to tumble down the slope and break a few bones to see it. My peers found a Cinnamon-rumped Trogon further up and other highlights along the main road included **Maroon Woodpecker**, **Black Magpies** and **Crested Jays**, all near the park HQ.

We night birded the main trail for two nights and one morning but all we saw was one **Brown Hawk-owl** and absolutely nothing else, not even heard. The soundscape at the frog pond was decent (this national park is more famous for the frogging and herping prospects than birding) and here we saw a Wallace's Flying Frog among the many other species.



Chestnut-naped Forktail



Black-capped Babbler

Borneo Highlands

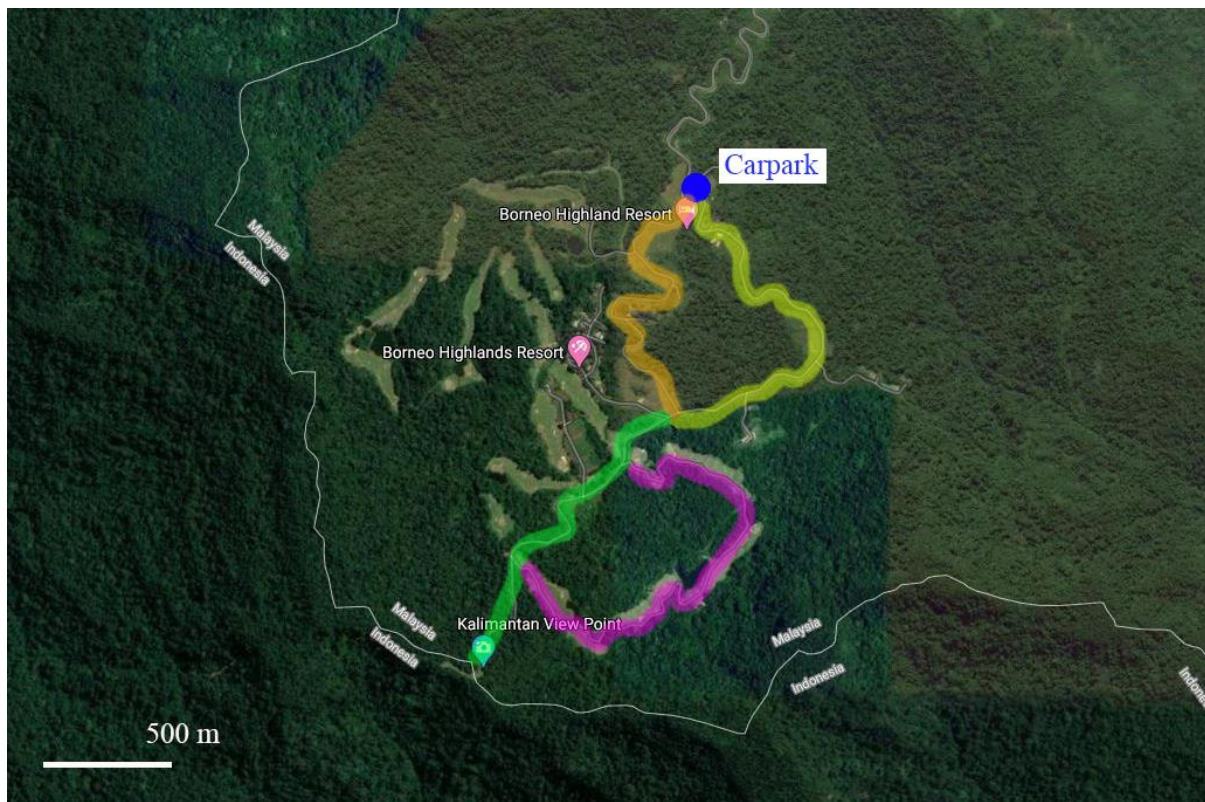
Borneo Highlands was deserted on both days of our visit. The main entrance was at GPS: 1.166861, 110.257430 and entrance fee was 10RM per person per day. Entry was permitted from 0700 to 1500 (no time limit to exit by). We were allowed to drive up the 8km road until the resort entrance carpark at GPS: 1.134619, 110.222884. There were supposedly shuttle buses from the resort entrance to the Kalimantan View Lookout Point for 10RM per person. We walked the path on the first day and were hoping to take the shuttle bus on the second but could not because the driver was apparently running errands elsewhere.

8km drive from main entrance to resort entrance

Along the drive up there was a carpark and a short (<100m) trail to a tiny waterfall. I unfortunately did not take a GPS of the entrance but it was very obvious and we made a brief stop here on the first morning. All we saw was a **Rufous-tailed Tailorbird**, **Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike** and some **Pacific Swallows**. Higher up – about 1km before reaching the resort entrance – we encountered a gorgeous trio of **White-crowned Hornbills** that provided brief but very close-up views.

Within the resort compound

We walked from the carpark via the orange route up to the Kalimantan View Point, birded the general area and the purple section, and went back down by the yellow route on our first day. On our second day, we ascended by the yellow route, birded a forest trail from the Kalimantan View Point (details below) and birded the purple section again until we were attacked by a sudden downpour. We were stranded until the worried resort security guard came to look for us and give us a lift back. (Thank you John Daweg for saving us!!).



Along the walk up

At the grassier sections along the way up – especially around the farms – we managed to find the endemic **Dusky Munia** and other edge species such as **Yellow-bellied Prinia** and **Yellow-vented Bulbul**. We also encountered **Orange-bellied** and **Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker**, **Bold-striped Tit-babbler**, **Chestnut-backed Scimitar Babbler**, **Violet Cuckoo** and **Dark-throated Oriole** among others.

Blue-eared, Red-throated, Golden-whiskered (Gold-faced) and **Bornean Barbets** were calling literally all over the resort. Not only did we struggle to see them, none of the barbets we managed to find were the Bornean.

Around Kalimantan View Point

A beautiful panoramic landscape of the Bornean mountain range was offered from the viewpoint. Here, we saw a **Peregrine Falcon** fly over from Indonesia without a passport, as well as a **Mountain Serpent Eagle** that soared over us while screaming its diagnostic call.



Around the viewpoint we encountered flocks of **Chestnut-crested Yuhina** and **Pygmy White-eyes**. The latter was relatively common throughout the whole resort. We also heard a **Rail-babbler** but was unable to find it. Other species seen around here included **Brown Barbet**, **Red-billed Malkoha**, **Cinereous (Green-winged) Bulbul** and **Red-bearded Bee-eater**.

There was a trail that started from the viewpoint (trailhead GPS: 1.116646, 110.214797) that we descended until around GPS: 1.117905 110.219113 before heading back out to the golf course. The whole length of the trail apparently led to the resort entrance. Near the trailhead we encountered a strangely dark blue **Pale Blue Flycatcher** and along the trail we encountered **White-bellied Erpornis**, **Yellow-bellied Warbler**, **Maroon Woodpecker** and **Green Broadbill** among others.

Purple area

The path along the golf course, especially around GPS: 1.119109, 110.221425, was quite productive. Here we encountered **White-rumped Shama**, **Oriental Magpie-robin**, **Greater Coucal**, **Spotted Fantail**, **Grey-throated babbler**, more **White-crowned Hornbills** and a **Hill (Dayak) Blue Flycatcher**.

Night birding

We night birded our way down on our first day. We encountered one **Oriental Bay Owl** and **Reddish Scops Owl** each although both were heard-only.

Systematic List of Birds

102 species seen, 17 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

S = Semenggoh Nature Reserve and roadside trail, K = Kubah National Park, BH = Borneo Highlands

No.	English Name	Latin Name	S	K	BH
1	Grey-rumped Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>			1
2	Plume-toed Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia affinis</i>	1		1
3	Silver-Rumped Spinetail	<i>Rhaphidura leucopygialis</i>		1	
4	Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>		1	
5	House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>	1	1	1
6	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>			1
7	Raffles's Malkoha	<i>Rhinortha chlorophaea</i>		HO	
8	Red-Billed Malkoha	<i>Zanlostomus javanicus</i>			1
9	Chestnut-Breasted Malkoha	<i>Phaenicophaeus curvirostris</i>		1	
10	Violet Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>		HO	1
11	Little Bronze Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx minutillus</i>		HO	
12	Rusty-breasted Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sepulcralis</i>		HO	HO
13	Square-tailed Drongo-Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>		1	HO
14	Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>			HO
15	Thick-billed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>			1
16	Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>		1	
17	Mountain Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis kinabaluensis</i>			1
18	Blyth's Hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus alboniger</i>			1
19	Black Eagle	<i>Ictinaetus malaiensis</i>			1
20	Oriental Bay Owl	<i>Phodilus badius</i>			HO
21	Reddish Scops Owl	<i>Otus rufescens</i>	HO		HO
22	Sunda Scops Owl	<i>Otus lempiji</i>	HO		
23	Brown Hawk-owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>		1	
24	Diard's Trogon	<i>Harpactes diardii</i>		HO	
25	Scarlet-Rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes duvaucelii</i>		HO	
26	White-crowned Hornbill	<i>Berenicornis comatus</i>			1
27	Banded Kingfisher	<i>Lacedo pulchella</i>		1	
28	Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca</i>		1	
29	Red-Bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctyornis amictus</i>			1
30	Golden-whiskered Barbet	<i>Psilopogon chrysopogon</i>			HO
31	Red-crowned Barbet	<i>Psilopogon rafflesii</i>		1	
32	Red-Throated Barbet	<i>Psilopogon mystacophanos</i>	1	1	HO
33	Blue-Eared Barbet	<i>Psilopogon duvaucelii</i>	HO	HO	HO
34	Bornean Barbet	<i>Psilopogon eximius</i>			HO
35	Brown Barbet	<i>Caloramphus fuliginosus</i>			1
36	Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>		HO	
37	Maroon Woodpecker	<i>Blythipicus rubiginosus</i>		HO	1

38	Buff-rumped Woodpecker	<i>Meiglyptes tristis</i>		1	
39	Buff-necked Woodpecker	<i>Meiglyptes tukki</i>			HO
40	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>			1
41	Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>	HO	HO	1
42	Banded Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus javanicus</i>	HO		
43	Black-and-Yellow Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus ochromalus</i>	HO	HO	1
44	Green Broadbill	<i>Calyptomena viridis</i>	HO	HO	HO
45	Blue-banded Pitta	<i>Erythropitta arquata</i>		HO	
46	Black-Winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus hirundinaceus</i>			1
47	Large Woodshrike	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus</i>		1	
48	Rufous-Winged Philentoma	<i>Philentoma pyrhoptera</i>		1	
49	Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus</i>		1	
50	Mangrove Whistler	<i>Pachycephala cinerea</i>		1	
51	White-Bellied Erpornis	<i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i>		1	1
52	Dark-Throated Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthonotus</i>			1
53	Bronzed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>		1	
54	Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	1	HO	HO
55	Malaysian Pied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura javanica</i>			1
56	Spotted Fantail	<i>Rhipidura perlata</i>		1	1
57	Black-Naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>		HO	HO
58	Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone affinis</i>		HO	1
59	Crested Jay	<i>Platylophus galericulatus</i>		1	HO
60	Black Magpie	<i>Platysmurus leucopterus</i>	1	1	
61	Rail-babbler	<i>Eupetes macrocerus</i>			HO
62	Grey-headed canary-flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>		HO	
63	Black-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus atriceps</i>			1
64	Scaly-Breasted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus squamatus</i>			HO
65	Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>			1
66	Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>			1
67	Cream-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>		1	1
68	Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>			1
69	Spectacled Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus erythrophthalmos</i>		1	
70	Grey-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus bres</i>		1	
71	Charlotte's Bulbul	<i>Iole charlottae</i>		HO	
72	Streaked Bulbul	<i>Ixos malaccensis</i>		1	
73	Cinereous Bulbul	<i>Hemixos cinereus</i>			1
74	Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	1	1	1
75	Yellow-bellied Warbler	<i>Abroscopus superciliaris</i>			HO
76	Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>			1
77	Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>			HO
78	Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>	HO	HO	1
79	Ashy Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus ruficeps</i>		1	
80	Chestnut-backed Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus montanus</i>			1
81	Grey-Throated Babbler	<i>Stachyris nigriceps</i>			1
82	Chestnut-winged Babbler	<i>Stachyris erythroptera</i>		1	HO
83	Rufous-fronted Babbler	<i>Stachyridopsis rufifrons</i>		HO	HO

84	Bold-striped Tit-babbler	<i>Macronus bornensis</i>			HO
85	Fluffy-backed tit-babbler	<i>Macronus ptilosus</i>	1		
86	Brown Fulvetta	<i>Alcippe brunneicauda</i>		1	1
87	Short-tailed Babbler	<i>Malacocincla malaccensis</i>		HO	
88	Sooty-capped Babbler	<i>Malacopteron affine</i>		HO	
89	Scaly-Crowned Babbler	<i>Malacopteron cinereum</i>		1	1
90	Rufous-Crowned Babbler	<i>Malacopteron magnum</i>		HO	
91	Black-Capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum capistratum</i>		HO	
92	Chestnut-crested Yuhina	<i>Yuhina everetti</i>			1
93	Pygmy White-eye	<i>Oculocincta squamifrons</i>			1
94	Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>		1	1
95	Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	1		
96	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>			1
97	White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>		HO	1
98	Pale Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis unicolor</i>		1	1
99	Hill Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis whitei</i>			1
100	Bornean Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis superbus</i>		HO	
101	Grey-Chested Jungle Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis umbratilis</i>		1	HO
102	Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassinus</i>		1	
103	Chestnut-Naped Forktail	<i>Enicurus ruficapillus</i>		1	
104	Lesser Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cyanopogon</i>		1	
105	Blue-winged Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>		1	1
106	Yellow-Breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus maculatus</i>		1	
107	Yellow-rumped Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus xanthopygius</i>		1	1
108	Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus thoracicus</i>		1	
109	Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>	1		1
110	Ruby-cheeked Sunbird	<i>Chalcoparia singalensis</i>			1
111	Plain Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes simplex</i>		1	1
112	Brown-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>			1
113	Red-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes rhodolaemus</i>		1	1
114	Van Hasselt's Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma brasiliانا</i>		1	
115	Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>		1	
116	Temminck's Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga temminckii</i>		1	
117	Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>		1	1
118	Thick-billed Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera crassirostris</i>		1	
119	Dusky Munia	<i>Lonchura fuscans</i>			1