

## Trip report: Taman Negara, Malaysia (01/05/2022 - 05/05/2022)

By Okamoto Keita Sin

A short trip to Taman Negara together with one of my sharpest birding friends. We've both collectively visited the place four times, and on all four trips had a very birdy time. What could possibly go wrong?

### Main Locations Birded

Taman Negara



*Rufous-chested Flycatcher*

## **Planning the trip**

I was staring at my calendar one Thursday night and realised that the following weekend was four days long: a nine-day vacation was possible by just taking three days of leave. I frantically researched various potential places, but my time spent was futile as transports to feasible sites were booked out. Moreover, only one friend was available to join, so sites that required driving were completely out of the equation because \$. Things could have been better planned had I known about the holidays earlier. Spending those four days at home would have driven me crazy and I felt like throwing myself out of the window, so I settled with a short return to Taman Negara.

## **Accommodation**

### [D'Aman Guest House](#)

Booked via booking.com. One of the two power plugs in our room was faulty, and I had to sleep in a shallow u-shape because my bed frame was broken. The lodge advertised wifi on their booking.com page but there was none. I still recommend this place, though. It was also better than Taman Negara Travellers Lodge that I stayed during my two previous trips. The room was clean, and the host was responsive and helpful. Water kettle was available on request.

## **Transport**

I previously pre-booked train tickets to and from JB Sentral and Jerantut via easybook.com. From Jerantut to Kuala Tahan I took a taxi and returned via public bus. Hoped to do the same for this trip, but things have changed, and plans crumbled. Information here are all relevant as of May 2022.

1. KTM Trains [cannot be booked](#) on Easybook anymore, and is only possible through their [official website](#). On that note, [contacting Easybook](#) via their official Whatsapp (both call and text) is pointless.
2. Ongoing works between the JB Sentral – Kempas Baru section that is supposedly scheduled to complete in [May 2022](#).
3. Facebook pages of “Taman Negara NKS Hotel & Travel Sdn Bhd” and “Danz Travel & Adventures Sdn. Bhd” are unresponsive. I thought it was because they were on holiday, but my messages have not even been read as of writing (four weeks past my messages). Not sure if they are still operating.
4. The buses between Jerantut to Kuala Tahan no longer operate.

Due to ticketing issues, we booked train tickets from Kempas Baru to Mentakab (a station before Jerantut), and a return ticket from Jerantut to Kempas Baru. We failed to get beds for both train rides and spent our ~9+ hours sitting in the very cold cabin. Seats were alright. Our return train arrived two hours late and was further delayed by an hour even after accounting for its late arrival. From Mentakab we hired a taxi beforehand to Kuala Tahan (220 RM), and for our return trip we had no choice but to take a taxi to Jerantut too (100 RM). The taxi drivers we engaged can be contacted at +60 17-nine-five-eight-7750 (Mr. Nazeri) and +60 11-five-six-nine-three-5659 (I didn't get his name).

## **Food**

As we visited during holiday season, many eateries were closed. The multiple convenience stores were thankfully open. Meals were mostly either at the reasonably priced Kuala View Floating Restaurant (that I recommend over Mawar Restaurant which is beside the boat jetty) or biscuits/canned/instant food. Bread at the convenience stores were always expired.

## **Birding**

A rough map of Taman Negara is [here](#) (not to scale, but sufficient for familiarisation). The main trails in Taman Negara are clear and wide, with obvious reflective markers bolted into trees on slightly narrower ones. I don't recall these markers from my previous trips, so they were very welcome additions. Or maybe my eyes were just useless previously. Boardwalks were broken here and there but perfectly safe. I downloaded the [AllTrails](#) app and it was accurate. Trails only showed with internet connection (for free users like myself) but I had signal in the forest except at Bukit Teresek and beyond. There was really no need for it at all though.

The ~30 second boat ride from Kuala Tahan to the national park was 1RM. The national park's entrance fee was 1RM and camera fee 5RM, both valid throughout the visit. The park office did not operate in the early mornings, so we purchased tickets on our way out on day one which was alright. At the office we were told that Kumbang Hide was no longer accessible to independent visitors and that guides were mandatory, but that the national park itself had none and visitors have to engage tour companies. In fact, unlike before, guides are supposedly compulsory for any "long hike", apparently referring to anything beyond Lubok Simpon and the Canopy Walk. However, elsewhere in the park we found conflicting information on a notice instead stating that visitors could hike Bukit Teresek independently. Regardless, during our trip we were not questioned by any rangers, and a trio of staff maintaining the trails at Jenut Muda were very friendly.

My friend and I have both visited Taman Negara twice before – myself in [July 2017](#) and [late April 2019](#), while my friend in August 2018 and May 2019. Naturally, our targets converged to some of the rarer species in the Peninsula. Even if those targets could not be found, our previous experiences were amazing, so the birding would be fantastic in general, we thought...

Our 4.5 days of birding was awful. Few birds were singing, and even fewer were responsive, a shocking contrast from our previous visits during the same time period. We couldn't figure out the cause, and whatever it was, our sad haul taught us a hard lesson about the variability of the tropics. Leeches on the other hand were harlem shaking all over the forest, with an estimate of 50 leeches per day per person. Despite being used to them they were still messy and annoying.

I have no energy to prepare a proper report especially after two back-to-back disappointing overseas trips. The species list below will make it seem like it was a fruitful trip, but highlights are always deceiving. Thankfully, Kuala Tahan had nice and cheap ice cream, and the company was marvellous. This report ends here, and I hope the logistical information was at least useful.

**Update on 2022/10/16:** I figured that a document with limited bird information isn't really helpful and have updated this report with some notes on species that might be of interest.



*Rufous-collared Kingfisher*



*White-necked Babbler*

### Notes on some species

Species	Latin	Notes
Crested Fireback	<i>Lophura ignita</i>	Just one faraway ~20 seconds encounter one morning on the boardwalk to Lubok Simpon, about 100 metres from Mutiara campsite. Skittish.
Great Argus	<i>Argusianus argus</i>	During our previous trips they were shouting all over the forests, even at night, but very quiet this time round. Only heard four times, always just one to two bouts, and never the "wao-wao" but instead the (presumed) female call.
Malaysian Eared Nightjar	<i>Lyncornis temminckii</i>	Heard and seen briefly at Lubok Simpon at dusk.
Gould's Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus stellatus</i>	At least three birds at the Tabing x Tahan x Kumbang three-way junction. Chased for ~5 hours and got tantalisingly close but failed.
Blyth's Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus affinis</i>	Encountered a pair at dusk at the exact same spot I saw one in 2019 - the first flight of stairs from Lubok Simpon back towards Kuala Tahan. Vocal on all dusks we walked by. Also heard from Tabing at dawn.
Moustached Hawk-cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx vagans</i>	Heard multiple times but none were responsive.
Large Green Pigeon	<i>Treron capellei</i>	Was looking forward to getting improvement views at Lubok Simpon. On my previous trips they were very easy, but somehow near-absent this trip.
Lesser Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus humilis</i>	Two flyby encounters along Tembeling River. Once over our heads at Lubok Simpon, and second time from the bridge before the junction towards Tabing.
Reddish Scops Owl	<i>Otus rufescens</i>	One at the Tabing x Tahan x Kumbang three-way junction
Red-naped Trogon	<i>Harpactes kasumba</i>	Three heard only. None were responsive.
Diard's Trogon	<i>Harpactes diardii</i>	Two males seen fighting over a female along the flight of stairs from Jenut Muda towards Bukit Teresek. Otherwise, none heard at all.
Cinnamon-rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes orrhophaeus</i>	Two heard: one about 50 metres from Tabing, and another slightly towards Kumbang from the three-way junction. Both unresponsive.
Scarlet-rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes duvaucelii</i>	Six encounters and all unresponsive.
Helmeted Hornbill	<i>Rhinoplax vigil</i>	Six heard only encounters at various places. One heard from Lubok Simpon must definitely have been near and was possibly visible from Kuala Tahan based on the direction it was calling from.
Rufous-collared Kingfisher	<i>Actenoides concretus</i>	A pair at the first steep staircase across a stream from Mutiara towards Lubok Simpon. Another near the Tabing x Tahan x Kumbang three-way junction.

Banded Kingfisher	<i>Lacedo pulchella</i>	All heard only. None were responsive.
Blue-banded Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo euryzona</i>	A pair at Lubok Simpon seen every visit. Another heard between Jenut Muda and the northern Bukit Teresek entrance.
Olive-backed Woodpecker	<i>Gecinulus rafflesii</i>	A pair seen between Tabing and Bukit Teresek. Participating in a party of woodpeckers that consisted of Orange-backed, Maroon and Crimson-winged.
Dusky Broadbill	<i>Corydon sumatranus</i>	No less than four birds high up the canopy, but showing relatively well, between Jenut Muda and the northern entrance of Bukit Teresek.
Black-and-red Broadbill	<i>Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos</i>	A pair at Lubok Simpon seen every visit.
Giant Pitta	<i>Hydrornis caeruleus</i>	Personal main target of the trip. Had response from two separate birds in my previous visit. Tried at uncountable locations in the forest this time round including where I previously heard them but zero luck. Heard one on my last day when birding alone, at GPS: 4.399715, 102.402457. Made a beeline towards the sound only to realise that in between myself and the darn bird was a cliff and Tembeling river.
Malayan Banded Pitta	<i>Hydrornis irena</i>	Only heard twice, once at Tabing and once between Tabing and Bukit Teresek. Both times just several bouts of "prrrr" instead of "wao!". Otherwise completely unresponsive. They were calling at so many locations on previous visits...
Garnet Pitta	<i>Erythropitta granatina</i>	Biggest shock of the trip. They littered the forests in all our previous visits, but this time only heard twice, and both times just less than 4 bouts of short calls. Completely unresponsive.
Crested Jay	<i>Platylophus galericulatus</i>	Heard calling and singing every day, but none showed well. Of 16 encounters only two were responsive, but with views so crappy I could not even muster a record shot.
White-necked Babbler	<i>Stachyris leucotis</i>	A vocal individual at the first stream from the northern entrance of Bukit Teresek, GPS: 4.402304,102.404122, but only encountered during one of two visits here.
Large Wren-babbler	<i>Turdinus macrodactylus</i>	Very vocal at various locations in the forest, especially Jenut Muda, but super difficult to see.

## Bird List

84 (+1 unidentified to species) seen, 65 (+1 unidentified to species) heard

Nomenclature and taxonomy follow Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P. (Eds). 2021. IOC World Bird List (v11.2). doi: 10.14344/IOC.ML.11.2

<u>Species</u>	<u>Latin</u>	
Crested Fireback	<i>Lophura ignita</i>	
Great Argus	<i>Argusianus argus</i>	Heard Only
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>	Heard Only
Malaysian Eared Nightjar	<i>Lyncornis temminckii</i>	
Gould's Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus stellatus</i>	Heard Only
Blyth's Frogmouth	<i>Batrachostomus affinis</i>	
Silver-rumped Spinetail	<i>Rhaphidura leucopygialis</i>	
Brown-backed Needletail	<i>Hirundapus giganteus</i>	
Pacific/Cook's Swift	<i>Apus sp.</i>	
House Swift	<i>Apus nipalensis</i>	
Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	Heard Only
Lesser Coucal	<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>	Heard Only
Raffles's Malkoha	<i>Rhinortha chlorophaea</i>	
Violet Cuckoo	<i>Chrysococcyx xanthorhynchus</i>	
Banded Bay Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>	Heard Only
Plaintive Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>	Heard Only
Rusty-breasted Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sepulcralis</i>	Heard Only
Square-tailed Drongo-cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>	
Moustached Hawk-cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx vagans</i>	Heard Only
Indian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	Heard Only
Common Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	
Little Green Pigeon	<i>Treron olax</i>	Heard Only
Thick-billed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron curvirostra</i>	
Large Green Pigeon	<i>Treron capellei</i>	
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	Heard Only
Changeable Hawk-eagle	<i>Nisaetus cirrhatous</i>	Heard Only
Lesser Fish Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus humilis</i>	
Reddish Scops Owl	<i>Otus rufescens</i>	
Red-naped Trogon	<i>Harpactes kasumba</i>	Heard Only
Diard's Trogon	<i>Harpactes diardii</i>	
Cinnamon-rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes orrhophaeus</i>	Heard Only
Scarlet-rumped Trogon	<i>Harpactes duvaucelii</i>	Heard Only
Rhinoceros Hornbill	<i>Buceros rhinoceros</i>	Heard Only
Great Hornbill	<i>Buceros bicornis</i>	Heard Only
Helmeted Hornbill	<i>Rhinoplax vigil</i>	Heard Only
Black Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros malayanus</i>	Heard Only
Rufous-collared Kingfisher	<i>Actenoides concretus</i>	
Banded Kingfisher	<i>Lacedo pulchella</i>	Heard Only
Stork-billed Kingfisher	<i>Pelargopsis capensis</i>	Heard Only
White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	Heard Only
Blue-banded Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo euryzona</i>	

Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher	<i>Ceyx erithaca</i>	
Red-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctornis amictus</i>	Heard Only
Blue-throated Bee-eater	<i>Merops viridis</i>	Heard Only
Golden-whiskered Barbet	<i>Psilopogon chrysopogon</i>	Heard Only
Red-throated Barbet	<i>Psilopogon mystacophanos</i>	Heard Only
Yellow-crowned Barbet	<i>Psilopogon henricii</i>	Heard Only
Blue-eared Barbet	<i>Psilopogon duvaucelii</i>	Heard Only
Grey-and-buff Woodpecker	<i>Hemicircus concretus</i>	
Banded Woodpecker	<i>Chrysophlegma miniaceum</i>	
Crimson-winged Woodpecker	<i>Picus puniceus</i>	
Olive-backed Woodpecker	<i>Gecinulus rafflesii</i>	
Maroon Woodpecker	<i>Blythipicus rubiginosus</i>	
Orange-backed Woodpecker	<i>Reinwardtipicus validus</i>	
Rufous Woodpecker	<i>Micropternus brachyurus</i>	
Buff-rumped Woodpecker	<i>Meiglyptes tristis</i>	
Buff-necked Woodpecker	<i>Meiglyptes tukki</i>	
Great Slaty Woodpecker	<i>Mulleripicus pulverulentus</i>	Heard Only
Blue-rumped Parrot	<i>Psittinus cyanurus</i>	
Blue-crowned Hanging Parrot	<i>Loriculus galgulus</i>	
Dusky Broadbill	<i>Corydon sumatranus</i>	
Black-and-red Broadbill	<i>Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchos</i>	
Banded Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus javanicus</i>	Heard Only
Black-and-yellow Broadbill	<i>Eurylaimus ochromalus</i>	
Green Broadbill	<i>Calyptomena viridis</i>	
Giant Pitta	<i>Hydrornis caeruleus</i>	Heard Only
Malayan Banded Pitta	<i>Hydrornis irena</i>	Heard Only
Garnet Pitta	<i>Erythropitta granatina</i>	Heard Only
Blue-winged Pitta	<i>Pitta moluccensis</i>	Heard Only
Black-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus hirundinaceus</i>	Heard Only
Rufous-winged Philentoma	<i>Philentoma pyrhoptera</i>	
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	Heard Only
Green Iora	<i>Aegithina viridissima</i>	Heard Only
Scarlet Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus speciosus</i>	Heard Only
Bar-bellied Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina striata</i>	
Lesser Cuckooshrike	<i>Lalage fimbriata</i>	Heard Only
White-bellied Erpornis	<i>Erpornis zantholeuca</i>	Heard Only
Dark-throated Oriole	<i>Oriolus xanthonotus</i>	Heard Only
Black-naped Oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	Heard Only
Greater Racket-tailed Drongo	<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	
Spotted Fantail	<i>Rhipidura perlata</i>	
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	
Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone affinis</i>	
Crested Jay	<i>Platylophus galericulatus</i>	
Malayan Black Magpie	<i>Platysmurus leucopterus</i>	Heard Only
Slender-billed Crow	<i>Corvus enca</i>	
Grey-headed Canary-flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>	Heard Only
Hairy-backed Bulbul	<i>Tricholestes criniger</i>	
Yellow-bellied Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus phaeocephalus</i>	

Grey-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus tephrogenys</i>	
Puff-throated Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus pallidus</i>	
Finsch's Bulbul	<i>Iole finschii</i>	Heard Only
Buff-vented Bulbul	<i>Iole crypta</i>	
Streaked Bulbul	<i>Ixos malaccensis</i>	
Spectacled Bulbul	<i>Ixodia erythroptalmos</i>	
Cream-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus simplex</i>	
Olive-winged Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus plumosus</i>	
Asian Red-eyed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus brunneus</i>	Heard Only
Stripe-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus finlaysoni</i>	
Yellow-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	
Pacific Swallow	<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	
Arctic Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	
Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>	Heard Only
Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	Heard Only
Dark-necked Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus atrogularis</i>	
Rufous-tailed Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sericeus</i>	Heard Only
Pin-striped Tit-babbler	<i>Mixornis gularis</i>	
Chestnut-winged Babbler	<i>Cyanoderma erythropterum</i>	
Rufous-fronted Babbler	<i>Cyanoderma rufifrons</i>	Heard Only
Black-throated Babbler	<i>Stachyris nigricollis</i>	
Chestnut-rumped Babbler	<i>Stachyris maculata</i>	
Grey-headed Babbler	<i>Stachyris poliocephala</i>	
White-necked Babbler	<i>Stachyris leucotis</i>	
Large Wren-babbler	<i>Turdinus macrodactylus</i>	
Sooty-capped Babbler	<i>Malacopteron affine</i>	
Scaly-crowned Babbler	<i>Malacopteron cinereum</i>	
Rufous-crowned Babbler	<i>Malacopteron magnum</i>	
Moustached Babbler	<i>Malacopteron magnirostre</i>	
Malayan Black-capped Babbler	<i>Pellorneum nigrocapitatum</i>	
Short-tailed Babbler	<i>Pellorneum malaccense</i>	Heard Only
White-chested Babbler	<i>Pellorneum rostratum</i>	
Ferruginous Babbler	<i>Pellorneum bicolor</i>	
Abbott's Babbler	<i>Malacocincla abbotti</i>	Heard Only
Horsfield's Babbler	<i>Malacocincla sepiaria</i>	Heard Only
Asian Fairy-bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>	
Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>	Heard Only
Oriental Magpie-robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	
Rufous-tailed Shama	<i>Copsychus pyrropygus</i>	
White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	Heard Only
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	Heard Only
Pale Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis unicolor</i>	Heard Only
Indochinese Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis sumatrensis</i>	
Grey-chested Jungle Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis umbratilis</i>	
Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassinus</i>	Heard Only
Chestnut-naped Forktail	<i>Enicurus ruficapillus</i>	
White-crowned Forktail	<i>Enicurus leschenaulti</i>	Heard Only
Rufous-chested Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula dumetoria</i>	



Greater/Lesser Green Leafbird	-	Heard Only
Blue-winged Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis moluccensis</i>	
Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Prionochilus thoracicus</i>	
Orange-bellied Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma</i>	Heard Only
Plain Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes simplex</i>	
Red-throated Sunbird	<i>Anthreptes rhodolaemus</i>	
Purple-naped Sunbird	<i>Kurochkinogramma hypogrammicum</i>	Heard Only
Little Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera longirostra</i>	Heard Only
Long-billed Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera robusta</i>	
Spectacled Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera flavigaster</i>	
Grey-breasted Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera modesta</i>	
Eurasian Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	
Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	