

**KERINCI and TAPAN ROAD**  
**SUMATRA 22 – 29 SEPTEMBER 2007**



Forest at Gunung Kerinci is encroached on at all sides by cabbage and potato farms, the sound of chain saws and axes heard daily.

#### PARTICIPANTS

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All photographs bar the above taken by Tan Gim Cheong

#### GETTING THERE

We flew from Singapore to Padang with the budget airline Tiger Airways. [www.tigerairways.com](http://www.tigerairways.com). The price of these tickets varies with availability. I paid \$175 Singapore last minute booking but for flights leaving in November of this year they are currently offered for an incredible \$109 Singapore. This very convenient flight leaves from the new budget terminal at Changi Airport.

#### GROUND ARRANGEMENTS

Gim Cheong did all the organising and research here. We decided the easiest, quickest and least

stressful thing to do was to let Pak Subandi look after us completely. Pak Subandi owns and runs the homestay at Kersik Tua the closest village to Kerinci and is well accustomed to the needs and wants of birders. He is also mostly an excellent birding guide, particularly for night birding (refer to the advice section below).

Pak now owns his own car which he sent to pick us up and take us back to Padang airport at least a 6 hour drive each way. He also gave us lifts to and from the trail head (about a 15 minute drive each way) every day, including our first afternoon and last morning. He and his wife had no problem about waking up at 3.30am every day and cooking us breakfast, preparing a packed lunch and also cooking us an evening meal on our late return from the field. They also prepared a hot bucket of water for a shower at the end of a tiring day. We also used Pak and his car for a day on Tapan road (another long drive) which was pretty productive. The total price for all transport costs, full board accommodation and 4 days guiding which included about 16 hours a day in the field came to around 5,480,000 Rp for the two of us. Although basic, Subandi's Homestay was clean, welcoming and comfortable but rather cold at night.

Pak Subandi speaks quite good English (self taught) his contact number is +62 748 357009.

## WEATHER

We had two full days of lovely weather. The other days usually consisted of bright, clear mornings followed by rain in the late afternoon. We didn't lose any birding time to the weather really. The rain though heavy at times was mostly quite short lived, usually no more than a couple of hours. It was quite cold in the early mornings and evenings.

## ADVICE

As mentioned above it's cold here, this is exacerbated by having soaking wet clothes and walking slowly along the trail and standing / sitting still for periods of time. The main reason your clothes and boots become soaked is because you will be crashing through wet undergrowth after the skulkers in the mornings. My boots seem to have lost their waterproof ability and my cotton trousers never seemed to dry out all week – not pleasant things to put on at 3.30 am. It would be prudent to take waterproof clothing as well as several layers (to put on or take off as required) as low down it can be pretty warm midday. With hindsight I would only have used Pak's guiding on the first two days. There is only 1 main trail and another side trail starting from the base shelter so you can't really get lost. His technique of Pitta attraction seemed to be to whistle incessantly. Whilst this was a pretty good imitation it just seemed to shut them up altogether. This, together with him crashing through the undergrowth after them is perhaps a contributing factor in our disastrous dip – who knows? In comparison however, he was excellent at whistling in Graceful Pitta and the Frogmouth and also Red-billed Partridge all of which I'm sure would not be on our list without him. The guy has an incredible amount of energy probably due to the Indonesian coffee which is served here very sweet and with the consistency of mud – a powerdriver! The trail is steep and slippery and Pak had no hesitation leading us off it and up and down steep ravines in dense vegetation with loads of rattan – prepare to be scratched! Gim developed a bad knee after all the steep slippery ascending and descending. This prevented him from reaching the higher parts of the trail on a couple of occasions. Another day for Tapan Road would definitely add to the list total. Our trip was after a pretty busy August for birding on Kerinci and I was under the impression that the main birds were a bit taped out on our visit? It may be wise to be there at the start of the season rather than the end.

It was Ramadan when we were there, this didn't get in the way of anything and Pak Subandi's wife

made us huge packed lunches and supplied biscuits and bottled water so no problem there. The only hassle was all the mosques in the whole region were blasting out prayers all night long, non stop, at a billion decibels (including the one next door to our bedrooms at the homestay). For that reason alone, it could be worth avoiding this time of year as sleep just wasn't an option for us.

## SUMMARY OF ROUTE

Pak knows all the locations mentioned and there are birder's maps in the log book at Subandi's. Here is a quick description of the usual route at Kerinci.

Drive from Subandi's Homestay to trail head 15 minutes.

Walk uphill following trail to forest edge 10 minutes (branch left here 5 minutes before forest edge for the dry river bed, 10 minutes).

At forest edge follow the main (only) trail uphill to the banana plantation/clearing, 15 minutes.

From the banana plantation/clearing carry on forward for 10 – 15 minutes until you reach the Base Shelter/Camp. This corrugated shelter is now in ruins. Here there is a side trail off to the right which leads to a steep gully and then turns to the left uphill eventually hitting the main trail again at Air Minum c45 minutes up, this was good birding. Another trail from the Base Shelter branches left for a short way before hitting the top of the gully with the dry river bed this also was good birding but far too steep to get down from here to the river bed.

Back at the Base Camp/Shelter carry on along the main trail upwards for 40 minutes until you hit a circular clearing before a steep incline with a rusting sign. This is Air Minum. Looking uphill the trail off to the right is the alternative side trail leading back down to Base Camp. The trail off to the left leads to an overlook of the dry stream bed.

From Air Minum the trail rises steeply for 20 minutes until you hit 2 large fallen trees blocking the trail, they cross over each other. Scramble over these (easy). A nice place for lunch sitting on these.

After this the trail runs flat for a while before rising steeply and slippery again to Camp Cochoa about 40 minutes away. This shelter is also in ruins.

After here the trail still ascends steeply and slippery before leveling out just before the burnt tree. A huge dead tree on the right of the trail with a burnt, hollow center – you can't miss it. The trail then runs flat for 100m then rises steeply and abruptly – this is the Cochoa site.

There is not much need to go any further than this but I paid a visit to the 1<sup>st</sup> shelter another steep and slippery climb of about 30 minutes. This shelter is also in ruins.

## GRUESOME DIPS

No sight or sound of Bronze-tailed Peacock Pheasant from the dry river bed. Despite hearing several Schneider's Pittas some very close they just wouldn't show. Whistles and tape playing just seemed to shut them up and walking in also did the same – very frustrating! Didn't connect with any Pink-headed Fruit Doves and Sumatran Wren-Babblers just didn't happen despite specifically looking and listening all the time for them. Another stupid dip was Rajah Scops Owls as we didn't realise till too late that

Birds of Tropical Asia 3 didn't have it – as we booked quite late we didn't have time to get a recording!! Also despite hanging around the fields at the forest edge dawn and dusk we saw no Nightjars and only heard Rufous Woodcock from the banana clearing on 3 nights.

### THE SCARY MAMMAL MOMENT

About 8 o'clock on the Wednesday night we were all stood very quietly by the banana clearing below Base Shelter. Pak in front, Gim behind him and me at the rear listening for owls / frogmouths. It was a very dark, cloudy night. Suddenly Pak leapt backwards making a strange growling whooping noise, onto Gim who leapt onto me. This was answered immediately by a rather scary snarly sound and something huge crashed off the trail into the bushes. Talking to Pak afterwards (after the adrenalin and heartbeats had subsided) he said he saw a thigh high broad shadow ambling down the trail. He was so shocked by this apparition he forgot how to switch Gims torch on and could only brandish it like a club in front of himself whilst making scary noises to frighten it off. The shadow at this stage was no more than 3 metres away! Gim saw the huge shadow just as it crashed off the trail, I saw nothing!

Examination of the trail afterwards found huge fresh bear prints and great gouging claw marks on a tree root just where the creature was surprised. We surmise that it was a Sun Bear!

On our first full day in the forest we followed large cat prints from around this area, obviously very fresh as they were over our boot prints from the night before. These went all the way up the trail to just below Air Minum in the direction we were walking. Andy Mears had excellent views of a Clouded Leopard around the base camp area just before our trip and judging by the size of the tracks we presume it was the same cat. Above Air Minum I also found smaller cat prints probably belonging to a Golden Cat.

### CUTE DIZZY MAMMAL MOMENT

On the Friday I got high up the trail pretty early to try for the Cochoa and was taking a breather between the fallen logs and the Cochoa shelter when I saw something bulky and gray on the trail about 25 metres ahead. At first I thought this was a Salvadori's Pheasant, but it then started to bumble and scruffle very slowly down the trail towards me. Obviously now a mammal, it continued on its slow progress until its nose banged into my boots (they were pretty horridly smelly by this stage). It sniffed them with its pink, piggy nose, slowly turned around and bumbled and snudged its way back up the trail in its slow manner back from whence it came. I was struck by its similarity to European Badger but really didn't have a clue. A look in the book on return revealed an ID of Hog Badger – mega!!!!

### MONKEY BUSINESS

Several groups of Siamangs were whooping and wailing each morning doing their usual trick of drowning out any bird calls in a kilometre radius. Also the rufous phase of Banded Langur was common.

### THE BIRDS

Bold denotes a Sumatran endemic, underlining denotes a tick for me.

Black-shouldered Kite: 2 seen perched up in fields from Kerinci approach track on the first Saturday.

Black Eagle: 1 seen several times soaring over forest at Camp Cochoa on Friday.

Blyth's Hawk-Eagle: A dark bird seen soaring over Tapan Road on Tuesday was probably Blyth's.

**Red-billed Partridge:** A covey heard whistling mid way between base camp and Air Minum on Sunday. Pak Subandi's whistling induced one to quickly scuttle over the trail making strange guttural noises and giving crap views but a mega tick! These birds also heard on Wednesday at a nearby location.

**Salvadori's Pheasant:** On Sunday whilst trying to see Red-billed Partridge a pair was heard wing ruffling (displaying). On Monday crippling views obtained of two males walking down the trail mid way between Base Camp and Air Minum, these birds initially located by their display wing ruffling/beating heard in the undergrowth. On Tuesday bumped into 2 females between the fallen trees and camp Cochoa just sat in the middle of the trail allowing a close approach. Later 1 male observed further down the trail just below the fallen trees. These were the only ones seen.

Slaty-breasted Rail: Heard within dense grassy vegetation in the fields just below the forest edge but unfortunately not seen.

Rufous Woodcock: Heard on a couple of mornings giving roding flight calls over the forest but none seen.

**Sumatran Green Pigeon:** A few seen on Sunday morning in a fruiting Ficus near to the Base Shelter.

Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon: The commonest pigeon. Seen with Sumatran Green Pigeons in the same Ficus Tree but more common around the Burnt Tree area where there was a number of fruiting trees.

Mountain Imperial Pigeon: Heard at Kerinci and Tapan Road but not seen.

**Barred Cuckoo-Dove:** Only 1 identified on the Saturday evening flying along the edge of the forest from the entrance track.

Little Cuckoo-Dove: Several seen along the Tapan Road on Tuesday.

Emerald Dove: Seen at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Green-billed Malkoha: A pair seen high up the Tapan road.

Greater Coucal: Heard along the Tapan Road.

Barn Owl: 1 sat on the approach track by the tea plantations at 4am one morning at Kerinci.

**Barred Eagle-Owl:**



Pak Subandi took us to his stake out near the dry riverbed. An adult bird gave crippling views as it called continually at close range at 16.15 onwards on the first Saturday – superb!!!! This bird was later seen flying over the fields below the forest edge one night. We also saw it on the Thursday early evening calling from a tree in the dry river bed.

Sumatran Collared Owlet: It is indeed vocally distinct so perhaps a split. We heard 2 birds, 1 near the base camp and 1 from Air Minum but they didn't come in to the tape.

Mountain Scops-Owl:



Up to several heard nightly at Kerinci. 2 where eventually called in and gave crippling views at head height between the banana plantation and base camp. Note in the photograph the distinctive collar of white feathers with black tips of the Sumatran race *vandewateri*.

**Sumatran (Short-tailed / Pale-headed) Frogmouth:** Heard calling most nights but not that tape responsive. We got crippling views of 1 by the base camp on Wednesday morning which came in to our tape and Pak Subandi's excellent imitations. We heard one calling excessively one morning from the dry riverbed which did come in but only gave brief views.

Glossy Swiftlet: Common at Kerinci over the fields and tea plantation.

House Swift: at least one seen over the fields at Kerinci.

Whiskered Treeswift: Several seen perching up on roadside trees at Tapan Road.

**Sumatran Trogon:**



Two excellent sightings on Sunday and Monday of individuals both showing well. One also heard on Wednesday but not seen. All around the Base Camp.

Wreathed Hornbill: 4 seen flying over the Tapan Road on Tuesday and two unidentified Hornbills flying over Air Minum at Kerinci probably also this species.

Fire-tufted Barbet: Common and easy to see at Kerinci.

Black-browed Barbet: Commonly heard and a few seen daily at Kerinci. Also seen Tapan Road.

Greater Yellownappe: Seen at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Lesser Yellownappe: Seen at Tapan Road and possibly Kerinci.

Maroon Woodpecker: Nice views of 2 individuals at Kerinci – a top woodpecker!

**Graceful Pitta:**



Dipped at the first Tapan Road gully Subandi took us to. The second attempt at a lower gully between the 24 and 25 km markers produced an immature bird found by Pak to the right of the road. We went in on the left side and immediately heard one calling. This was taped out into an open patch of forest floor into a pool of sunlight along with its mate where they showed superbly – Mega!!!!

Schneider's Pitta: Several heard calling most early mornings and less so in the evening, tragically couldn't locate any of them!

Barn Swallow: A few hawking over the fields Kerinci.

Pacific Swallow: Tapan Road.

Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike: A component of all bird waves at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Sunda Cuckoo-Shrike: A pair found within a bird wave midway down the Tapan Road.

Grey-chinned Minivet: Fairly common in waves at Kerinci.

Sunda Minivet: Commoner than the above at Kerinci some nice big groups observed. Also Tapan Road.

Scarlet Minivet: A small group seen by a large bridge on Tapan Road.

**Sumatran Leafbird:** An area of flowering trees high up the Tapan Road was excellent for birds including at least 3 of these recently split (from Golden-fronted) goodies.

**Blue-masked Leafbird:** Around 10 birds noted in the same trees as the above at Tapan Road. A beautiful bird.

**Cream-striped Bulbul:** Several seen along Tapan Road.

**Spot-necked Bulbul:** The commonest Bulbul along Tapan Road. Seen in small groups in tree tops, a nice bird.

**Grey-cheeked Bulbul:** Seen occasionally in bird waves along Tapan Road.

Yellow-vented Bulbul: seen on the drive from Pedang to Kersik Tua.

Ashy Bulbul: 2 seen at Tapan Road.

Ashy Drongo: Quite common along Tapan Road.

Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo: 1 seen at Kerinci below Air Minum.

**Sumatran Drongo:** Several seen along Tapan Road.

Black-and-crimson Oriole: Common along Tapan Road.

Green Magpie: Only 1 seen by the flowering trees high up Tapan Road.

**Sumatran Treepie:** Good numbers seen along Tapan Road. Great birds!

Great Tit: Seen at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Blue Nuthatch: A common component of bird waves at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Lesser Shortwing: Common at Kerinci and pleasantly easy to see here. Birds commonly heard singing.

White-browed Shortwing: Common at Kerinci above Air Minum, although singing, hard to see but got good looks of some.

**Rusty-breasted Wren-Babbler:**



Commonly heard at Kerinci, a great song! But proved elusive until I broke the ice on Thursday taping a pair out, after this saw loads and Gim Cheong actually found us a nest with a large chick in it – nice one! We found them to be not that tape responsive compared to other trip reports.

Eye-browed Wren-Babbler:



2 pairs seen around the base camp on separate days and also 1 seen above the fallen trees.

Pygmy Wren-Babbler: By far the commonest Wren-Babbler seen daily and in song.

Golden Babbler: Common in bird waves at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Grey-throated Babbler: The common *stachyris* seen in all bird waves at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Spot-necked Babbler: 2 birds pulled out of a flock of Grey-throated near the base camp area Kerinci.

Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush: 2 birds seen high up the Tapan Road.

White-browed Shrike-Babbler: Occasional birds noted at Kerinci all higher than Air Minum. Seen daily.

Long-tailed Sibia: birds heard around the burnt tree but none seen.

Magpie Robin: Tapan Road.

Sunda Blue Robin: Seen daily at Kerinci actually on the trail. All birds between the base camp and Air Minum.

Lesser Forktail: 1 bird seen in the Marbled Wren Babbler gully, Tapan Road.

**Sumatran Cochoa**: Frustratingly, birds were heard calling at Air Minum and Camp Cochoa but none showed or where tape responsive. A strenuous walk up to the burnt tree on Friday finally nailed it. Presumably an adult female, perched 25m up a tree, 100m beyond the burnt tree, just where the trail starts to rise significantly again. Exactly the same spot Albert Low and Andy Mears saw it a few weeks ago. By their description it is the same bird. Crown was a greyish blue colour, face was rich rufous ginger which extended down to the upper breast. The rest of the plumage was black apart from the wing patches which were sky blue – Mega!!! The bird was heard calling at 15.30 after a hot, sunny midday (a rare thing on our visit) just when the temperature considerably dropped. I was previously playing the tape but do not think it responded to it.

**Shiny Whistling Thrush**: The commonest Whistling Thrush, several seen daily. The picture in MacKinnon & Phillipps is not that accurate. Birds looked darker and the spangling was restricted to the head, upper breast and upper mantle. Wings, belly, vent and tail appeared very dark, almost black with a hint of brown and contrasted. Pak Subandi rescued one from some lads in the foilds tightly wrapped in cloth, we cut it free and let it go. Nice in the hand!

**Brown-winged (Sunda/Sumatran) Whistling Thrush**: 3 birds seen only. 1 in the dry river bed and two on the trail around the base camp. I fail to see why this bird has been lumped with Sunda. The differences are striking. Again differed from MacKinnon and Phillipps illustration by being significantly brighter rufous in colouration on its mantle, wings, tail and underbelly. A striking contrast to the deep, blue, almost black of the head, neck and breast. A really nice bird.

Chestnut-crowned Warbler: A component of waves along the Tapan Road.

Sunda Warbler: Common at all levels on Kerinci and tame. Gim Cheong found a brilliant mossy nest in the roots of a fallen tree.

Mountain Leaf-Warbler: Common at Kerinci at all levels but significantly more so above Air Minum.

Sunda Bush Warbler: A few seen well calling in ground vegetation around Camp Cochoa and 1<sup>st</sup> shelter.

Mountain Tailorbird: Common on Kerinci.

Hill Prinia: Several seen in roadside rank grass along the upper part of the Tapan Road.

Verditer Flycatcher: Gim Cheong saw one on the Tapan Road.

Indigo Flycatcher: Only 1 seen on the last morning at Kerinci below the banana plantation.

Snowy-browed Flycatcher: Small numbers seen daily at Kerinci always really low down in the vegetation.

Rufous-chested Flycatcher: Gim Cheong saw a bird in the Graceful Pitta Gully Tapan Road.

Little Pied Flycatcher: 2 seen in a bird wave at Air Minum on Sunday.

Pygmy Blue Flycatcher: 1 seen in a bird wave at Air Minum on Monday and 1 seen in another bird wave by the base camp on the Wednesday.

Rufous-vented Niltava: 2 noted in the Burnt Tree area on Thursday.

White-throated Fantail: 1 – 3 noted in all bird waves at Kerinci.

Long-tailed Shrike: Common in the fields along the approach track to Kerinci.

Grey Wagtail: Common.

Javan Myna

Plain Sunbird: 1 seen along the Tapan Road.

Temminck's Sunbird: Several seen along the upper section of the Tapan Road. Also a cracking tame male by the Burnt Tree at Kerinci.

Little Spiderhunter: 1 at the Banana plantation at Kerinci on the Thursday morning.

Thick-billed Spiderhunter: 1 showing nicely in the flowering trees with the other good stuff high up the Tapan Road.

Mountain White-eye: Common at Kerinci and Tapan Road.

Black-capped White-eye: A large group joined a bird wave on the Friday around the Banana Plantation at Kerinci. I was beginning to wonder what had happened to them as they are supposed to be common here.

White-headed Munia: Groups seen in roadside grass verges high up the Tapan Road.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow

## **TOTALS**

96 species, 24 ticks and 17 of the endemics.