

Southern Sumatra
February 2013

Way Titias Camp



SOUTHERN SUMATRA FEBRUARY 2013

Introduction

This report details a two week tour of some of Southern Sumatra's highlights, with the principal aim of seeking Sumatra's two endemic Pittas as well as trying for Sumatran Ground Cuckoo and as many montane range restricted species as possible. The trip was planned by Martin Gottschling and included Holger Lauruskus and myself. This report is based on my notes and any background research into the trip and species seen or likely.

Logistics

Martin sorted all logistics with a friend and contact he has in Jakarta, an Indonesian birder named Ari, who he first met whilst working at the bird observatory on Heligoland a few years previous. The logistics basically followed that prescribed by recent trip reports notably the one by Ashley Banwell and John Gregory – using a middleman to contact the ground agents for two sites; Way Titias and Danau Ranau, who then set up the itinerary at these sites. They used a different fixer to us, but the details are otherwise roughly the same:

- [*Ashley Banwell & John Gregory \(2007\) "Little Known Southern Sumatra"*](#) – this report distils detailed information on who, how, where and what to expect, and covers everything in as much detail as is necessary to follow in their footsteps so is recommended as the starting point for any future visitors to this area of Bukit Barisan Selatan NP.

A growing number of people have now braved the rediscovered Sumatran Ground Cuckoo site at Way Titias in Bukit Barisan Selatan NP and have shared their experiences, and these formed background and pre-trip preparation. The following were consulted on top of the report mentioned above:

- [*Chris Gooddie \(2010\) "The Jewel Hunter" Wildguides*](#) (recommended reading - there is whole chapter on Sumatra – 'The Toktor will see you now' [...but not necessarily you it!]. I re-read this chapter a number of times prior to the trip, a nice introduction on what to expect, to compliment the logistical details in the Ashley Banwell & John Gregory report. Toktor by the way is the Indonesian name for the Ground-cuckoo;
- [*Wendy Newman \(2009\) Sumatra 1-22 September 2009*](#) another detailed account;
- Reports and general site information on the Birding Indonesia website: <http://burung-nusantara.org/> (including links here directly to the ground team contacts in Bukit Barisan Selatan if your Indonesian communication skills are upto the job of cutting out the middle man and organising with them directly over the phone - they speak no English);
- Martin also had information from various email exchanges on the Oriental Birding email group, primarily about the Ground Cuckoo site 'Way Titias', but also the nearby site 'Danau Ranau' where Schneider's Pitta was becoming a regular fixture. This included emails from Nick Brickle (who originally went with the local hunter Gamal to locate the Ground Cuckoo and become the first non-local to see one in the wild), Duncan Wilson, Chris Gooddie and others.

As well as visiting Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park we had a few nights in the Sumatran lowland site at Way Kambas National Park. There is a lot of information on this site, and the following accounts amongst others were read in preparation:

- *János Oláh & Attila Simay "Way Kambas National Park, Sumatra: The Best Asian Night-birding" BirdingAsia 8 (2007):39-44*
- *Paul Jepson ed. (2004) "Birding Indonesia: A Birdwatchers Guide to the Worlds Largest Archipelago" Periplus Action Guides*
- *Oscar Campbell (2012) "Sumatra 2012" Surfbirds Trip Reports*
- *Richard Webb (2012) "Sumatra: Way Kambas National Park 27 May – 4 June 2012" Mammalwatching.com*
- *A number of older trip reports were useful, including for Gunung Kerinci and Tapan Road as to the montane endemics generally.*

The only field guide we took were copies of *Mackinnon & Phillipps (1993) A Field Guide to the Birds of Borneo, Sumatra, Java and Bali*. This book is now getting quite out of date with the many splits and proposed splits of recent years – particularly of endemic forms. The gradual increase in birding in the region is providing more knowledge of avifauna, with for example, the well documented rediscovery of the Ground-cuckoo, plus other interesting snippets on target species like Graceful Pitta known from more recent times than 1918, and Sumatran Cochoa now known from more than the "...four specimens, all males, collected on Singgalang & Kerinci..." as stated in the book. There is also the odd mistake and the altitudinal ranges for a number of species are out of date. Having said all that it is however still a usable and useful guide, with lots of information present, and will continue to be the staple field guide until updated. It is also quite interesting to see what has changed and the advances in collective knowledge over the last 20 years.

A Note on Timing

Most birders take the more sensible option of visiting Sumatra during the main dry season period of late summer. A few have selected peak rainy season for the south (Noc/Dec-Jan/Feb), and others have visited towards the end of the peak rains in April. It is said that the climate is not particularly stable here and rain can be expected during any season, especially in the mountains. We encountered rain virtually daily, mostly in the afternoon and on a couple of occasions it curtailed all birding activities in the afternoon period and into the evening period. Even if not raining the threat of rain in the afternoons seemed enough to ensure the forests remained fairly quiet and bird activity low at that time of day. On a couple of days in Danau Ranau relatively strong and cold winds from the west were also a feature and this affected key morning birding periods; particularly the frequency of encounters with bird waves.

We selected February as a birding friend of Martin's had visited Danau Ranau in Feb 2012 and his experience was that both endemic Pitta species were actively defending territories during this period (and are thus more likely to be encountered). Although it would be nice to travel peak birding season, it is not a good option work wise for the three of us, so a favourable report from winter time was all that was needed for us to attempt the trip during the rains.

Locations



Map 1: The above illustrative map shows the general locations of National Parks and locations visited within them

Itinerary

Date	AM	PM	Eve
*30/01/2013			late eve flight Heathrow-Doha
*31/01/2013	early am flight Doha – Jakarta	Travelling	Arrive 22:00 overnight Amaris Hotel
01/02/2013	Flight Jakarta - Bandar Lampung Taxi to W. Kambas	Arrive Way Kambas	Stay at Way Kanan Field station
02/02/2013	Loop Trail	Main track	Main track (Field Station)
03/02/2013	Rawa Gajah Swamp	Main track	Main track (Field Station)
04/02/2013	Loop Trail	Travel to Liwa c7hrs	Walk to Gamal's House in dark overnight here
05/02/2013	Walk into Way Titias (6hrs)	camp (heavy rain until late pm)	Camping
06/02/2013	Way Titias SW of camp	Way Titias NE of Camp	Camping
07/02/2013	Way Titias E of camp	Way Titias E of camp	Camping
08/02/2013	Way Titias E of camp	Way Titias E of camp	Camping
09/02/2013	Way Titias E of camp	Walk out (4hrs) - Heavy Rain!	Hotel in Liwa
10/02/2013	Drive to Danau Ranau	walk up Danau Ranau (3hrs)	House in Coffee Plantation
11/02/2013	Danau Ranau	Danau Ranau	House in Coffee Plantation
12/02/2013	Danau Ranau	Danau Ranau	House in Coffee Plantation
13/02/2013	Danau Ranau	Danau Ranau	House in Coffee Plantation
14/02/2013	Danau Ranau	Walk out (2hrs) Drive 5hrs – Michael Schumacher style.	overnight Hotel opp. BL airport
*15/02/2013	Flight Bandar Lampung to Jakarta	Early eve flight to Doha	overnight connection to Heathrow
*16/02/2013	Arrive Heathrow am		

**my transit details*

Costs

The currency in Indonesia is the Indonesian Rupiah (IDR) at the time of visit the exchange rate was roughly £1 = IDR15,000, and my credit card charged me £66.32 for IDR1,000,000

I booked my air tickets a couple of weeks prior to departure. The long haul was with Qatar Airways and cost £582 return Heathrow to Jakarta with a layover in Doha. The internal flight was booked on the Garuda Indonesia website and cost £134 return Jakarta to Bandar Lampung (note current UK FCO advice on the various Indonesian airlines). A Visa is necessary in Indonesia for UK citizens, which can be obtained on arrival and is valid for 30 days (\$25US). An airport tax of IDR150,000 is payable on leaving the country.

The trip to the Bukit Barisan Selatan NP sites (Way Titias and Danau Ranau) was a fixed charge that covered all overheads (from pick up in Way Kambas to drop off at airport in Bandar Lampung). This is probably not the cheapest way of doing it, but left no uncertainties, which was helpful on such a tight trip time wise. The cost for three people for 10 days was IDR27,734,000 (just over £600 pp) – This covered the following:

- All food and accommodation (including hotel in Liwa (Permata Hotel) but not in Bandar Lampung);
- Use of two field assistants, **Gamal**¹ (Mr Toktor himself) – ex-hunter turned bird guide who has an excellent knowledge of the two sites and superb hearing and eyesight for the key species at least, and **Toni** – the Chef and overall general logistics man;
- Porters for our food, tents and overnight bags (they left us once set up in the forest);
- Charges for NP fees (we had a NP ranger accompany us for the duration on both trips, although they both mostly stayed at camp with Toni);
- Minibus from Way Kambas to Way Titias (c7hrs), Way Titias to Danau Ranau (c1.5hrs) and Danau Ranau to Bandar Lampung (c5hrs)

We managed to empty the ATM of cash at Bandar Lampung airport (be aware it's a very small airport!), as Toni met us from our flight and wanted full upfront payment in IDR, and that was after maxing the daily limit of our credit cards in Jakarta the night before, so we only needed half the cash from the BL ATM! Didn't notice any cash converters here, but there were plenty at Jakarta airport.

It may also be useful to future visitors if I also outline the other main charges we encountered in Way Kambas, which is not the cheapest park in this part of the world as official rules state you must be accompanied by a guard/ranger on all visits into the field. The charges between three people were however acceptable and it is good to know you are helping local jobs in conservation to some extent. The costs below are per group/activity and not individual costs:

- Half day trip into park per group with ranger/guide = IDR300,000
- Boat Trip to Rawa Gajah Swamp IDR500,000
- Overnight basic accommodation at Way Kanan Station 3nights = IDR900,000 for room
- Food, all meals and drinks (tea, coffee, mineral water) three days three people = IDR480,000. Despite offering to go shopping for us, we elected to survive on what the rangers had in stock (Mie (Noodles) & Nasi (Rice) Goreng (fried)). It is usually recommended you bring your own food with you if staying at Way Kanan field station and the rangers will cook it for you;
- We were recommended to pay the rangers a tip for any night birding excursions beyond what would be considered reasonable for a standard half day outing;
- Taxi from BL airport to Way Kambas = IDR660,000

¹ We called Gamal 'Kamal' as that is how he pronounced his name, but from correspondence with Nick Brickle he mentions that it is spelt with a 'G' and the pronunciation is guttural hence the inflection.

Hotel in Bandar Lampung opposite the Airport (Hotel Modjopahet) – IDR125,000 per twin room economy (and my room was pretty ropey). The AC rooms were full, maybe they were of a better standard.

Hotel in Jakarta – Amaris – cIDR200,000 twin room, aircon, *free shuttle to airport*, and Man United vs Soton on the tv, but I only got to enjoy the room for c5hrs.

Selected Diary

The sections below describe trip highlights.

(A) Way Kambas

One of the most well-known Sumatran National Parks, this is lowland forest that has been selectively logged but still retains the majority of bird and mammal interest. As well as degraded lowland Diptocarp forest with secondary mature scrub growth, there are large areas of swamp forest and sandy heath swamp. The main areas of accessibility for birding are along the main access track to a forest clearing with Ranger station along the River Kanan about 15km into the forest ‘Way Kanan’, a short loop trail from Way Kanan to the access road, boat trips along the River Kanan with access to Rawa Gajah swamp forest, and a further access road to the ‘Elephant Training Centre’ on the southern side of the Park.

For our visit we were without vehicular access and were dropped off at Way Kanan, staying here for three nights. This gave us 3 afternoon/eve birding and 3 mornings birding trips. In this time we navigated the loop trail on two mornings and the third was used for a boat trip to the Rawa Gajah area to look primarily for the endangered **White-winged Duck**. Our evening excursions were along the main access track and involved (when the weather allowed) night walks for the various nightbirds, the main two being **Bonaparte’s Nightjar** and **Large Frogmouth**. During the heat of the day I potted around the clearing at Way Kanan and also walked part of the loop trail. Although you are supposed to have a guard/ranger for every venture into the forest, I think so long as they like the look of you and you pass custom their way they are more relaxed about your every activity! For our main ventures into the forest we used the rangers every time.

The highlights of the time spent in Way Kambas included the following:

White-winged Duck – Seen well in flight on three occasions. The first time early morning from the boat on the River Kanan, a pair appeared to be roosting in a large riverine tree and took flight as our boat rounded the corner. Good but brief views were had as they veered off deeper into the swamp. A second encounter was along the swamp forest after disembarking in about two foot of water and wading through the forest to lakes hidden within the swamp. Here we stood viewing the open waterbodies for about 2hrs. Mid-morning a male White-winged Duck alerted us to his incoming via the characteristic farmyard honk. The bird was probably coming to land on the lake but as it flew directly over our heads veered off and over the clearing to a further lake. The final encounter was bizarrely, on the loop trail, where another male flew directly over our heads allowing brief views through the canopy on the last morning. It pays to learn the call of White-winged Duck as it is useful for alerting you of an incoming bird. The ranger we had with us, ‘Apri’ (the spelling may be incorrect) knew the calls.

Bonaparte's Nightjar – The usual clearing it seems for this species is the first larger clearing along the main track from Way Kanan. We arrived around dusk, which is likely to be the most productive time and almost immediately picked up a calling bird deep in the forest. I made some poor recordings of its bizarre call and we managed to tape it whereby it came into its regular clearing calling some more on an exposed branch briefly before flying around the clearing and off into the forest again.

Large Frogmouth – About 2km along from Way Kanan we were at another clearing on the second night (past the 'Stork pond') and were watching **Malaysian Eared Nightjar** when a bird flew along the access track and landed directly above our heads on a large bare branch. Putting bins to the bird we were all amazed to see it was a Large Frogmouth, which had come to check us out! At this point unfortunately it started raining heavily and the bird took cover back into the forest.

Oriental Bay Owl and other Night birds – Exceedingly lucky with the above two night birds our luck had clearly run out as we heard and tried to locate Oriental Bay Owl – moving through the jungle in the pitch black (as carefully as we could ofcourse) we got to where it was calling, but it was high up in the canopy of some large trees and we couldn't locate it! **Reddish Scops Owl, Brown Wood Owl and Brown Hawk Owl** all were heard only as were **Gould's and Javan Frogmouths**. The only other nightbird we saw was another nightjar, **Large-tailed Nightjar**, which is very common around Way Kanan camp. We didn't do any pre-dawn walks and one of our evening walks was unfortunately mostly rained off.

Great Argus – a very lucky encounter mid-day on the way into the park half way along the access track a bird crosses the road and watches us from the edge of the road for a couple of mins. I hadn't even unpacked the camera, although Martin quick as a flash scrambled for his bag and managed a record shot !

Malayan Banded Pitta – The species appeared to be at a high density from the number of calling birds we heard. Seen well a couple of times on the loop trail and main access road.

? **Giant Pitta** ? – Bit of a weird one this. We were walking along the loop trail, with our ranger Apri and I hear a bird off to the left which doesn't compute, nothing new there, but it sounds interesting. The other two to listen, and they aren't sure about the sound either. We turn to Apri and ask him if he knows what it is. In a ridiculously casual way he says it's a Giant Pitta. We wait around for about 45mins but all is stubbornly quiet. On quizzing Apri further about Giant Pitta he mentions where we were on the loop trail (by a meander of the stream) he has seen the species four times. To put this in context he has seen Sumatran Tiger eight times. Anyway it came to nothing for us, and I cant even say it was a Pitta, but I thought worth recounting the strange tale incase someone else is luckier. I took a GPS reading (S 05.03270°; E 105.77877°), but it's roughly half along the loop trail.

Blue-winged Leafbird *ssp. icterocephala* - The subspecies of Blue-winged Leafbird on Sumatra is one with a nice yellowish wash over the face and head and was seen on a couple of occasions along the access track and at the Way Kanan station.

Other species noted included: **Green, Banded, Dusky, Black & Yellow Broadbills; Red Bearded Bee-eater; Hooded Pitta; Red-naped, Diard's and Scarlet-rumped Trogons; Blue-eared Kingfisher, Rhinoceros & Bar-pouched Wreathed Hornbills; Red-crowned, Red-throated, Yellow-crowned, Blue-eared & Brown Barbets; White-crowned Forktail, Crested Wood Partridge, Crested Fireback, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch, Little Green Pigeon, Green Imperial Pigeon, Red-billed & Raffles Malkohas, Scaly-crowned, Rufous-crowned, Chestnut-winged, Chestnut-rumped, Black-throated, Black-capped and Pin-striped Tit-Babblers.** Woodpeckers were not as prevalent for us as some trip reports note, but we had good views of five species including **Orange-backed Woodpecker** on a number of occasions.

Other interest – We were rather restricted to the Way Kanan area so could not repeat the night drives as described by Richard Webb in his trip report from 2012, which did sound fairly productive. We saw a few species of interest though, including **Leopard Cat, Malay Civet, Sunda Colugo, Slow Loris, Sambar Deer, Red Muntjac, Wild Boar, Siamang** (commonly heard) and **Long-tailed Macaque**. A number of the smaller squirrels were left unidentified as were some pale rats along the loop trail at night, and one large squirrel looked to be **Prevost's Squirrel**. Roosting bats were noted at one location, appearing to be a one of the **Short-nosed Fruit Bats *Cynopterus sp.*** This attractive genus of small fruit bats contains a number of similar cryptic species some appear yet to be formally described. Evidence of Elephant and Sumatran Rhino was also noted. A large **Monitor Lizard** was seen at Rawa Gajah swamps.

The **Map** below shows the main areas visited:

Entrance Gate	S 05.07917; E 105.70351	Elevation 38m
Way Kanan Field Station	S 05.02787; E 105.77621	Elevation 26m
Old Storms Stork Pool	S 05.03598; E 105.76318	Elevation 40m
Rawa Gajah Swamp Pool	S 05.01821; E 105.76738	Elevation 18m



Map 2: Aerial Showing Main areas visited at Way Kambas NP

(B) Way Titias – Bukit Barisan Selatan NP

This part of Bukit Barisan Selatan National Park is primary hill forest to lower montane along a river with steep sided forested valleys and numerous streams cutting through the landscape. The access is via a c5km walk into the forest along the main river with numerous river crossings to just over knee height during our visit. The area has a number of small trails predominantly along ridge lines made by hunters and locals and is mostly closed forest. Gamal has a number of what can loosely be termed trails that he has cut into the area around the camp, and the local Ground Cuckoo territories, but they are probably barely discernible to anyone else.

We camped in the forest for four nights, under tarps and three tents (two new, one old). The tents were supplied by Toni and Gamal. Campsite was adjacent to a hillside stream cutting through a steep valley, part of the territory for a pair/family of Sumatran Ground Cuckoos. It took us 6 hours to reach campsite on the first morning, starting from Gamal's house (the start point on the map below), wading through the river and birding whilst we went. On arrival the rains started and didn't stop until pre-dawn the next morning! The first day from camp was spent heading south west in the morning and then north east in the afternoon. The next couple of days were spent in forest east of the camp and stream in the heart of the closest Ground Cuckoo territory. The final morning was a brief bit of birding and then the walk out which took only 4 hours to reach Gamal's house, whereby the heavens opened and we had a 45min walk through the open rice paddies and farmed land at Landos back to the road and Toni's house – the umbrella was mostly useless to such an onslaught, but luckily the waterproofing over my camera bag stood up to the test.

The camp and food provided by Toni at Way Titias was basic but friendly. Toni did a good job of repackaging the same meal, although if you aren't fond of rice or noodles then you may struggle. The rain was mostly manageable at camp and the tarps held it back well. The worst issue for me as someone with a camera was the additional humidity of sleeping and living right next to a stream, in what was probably 100% humidity in the forest during rainy season in any event. This more or less stuffed my camera in. It didn't stop working completely, but all the buttons on it did apart from the shutter. I had silica gel so sealed it in an air tight bag overnight, which would provide a temporary fix for the first hour or two of the morning, but by the time we came out of the forest I had to revert to a second camera body lent to me by my mate. Make sure you are well prepared if taking electronic equipment into the forest here.

Highlights from Way Titias:

Sumatran Ground Cuckoo – A tricky species to see and in the event only one of the group, Martin, had a good view of one. We heard them on three of the four days we were there, mostly the same territory, although distant birds to the north east were heard on a couple of occasions too. The sighting came on our first encounter, and this was the only time the birds were properly responsive to tape, whereby we managed to tempt one of the pair to leave the thick understorey vegetation of the lower valley sides and up onto a minor ridge through playback of that individual's call. Unfortunately the viewing opportunities were still limited and it probably saw us before we it. As it mooched back down to join its mate we circled round to get a view of the slope it was heading down and here Martin used his skills to turned a half chance into his sighting. The other mornings we concentrated on tracking the bird, which was how Gamal preferred to approach it, but with the thick valley side

understorey and four of us crashing along, with Gamal cutting new trails through it all, the Ground Cuckoos were always a few steps ahead – although Gamal did glimpse them a couple of times. On the final morning we very nearly got a sighting using this technique as two Cuckoos converged onto the area we had climbed up to from the stream, but again they backed away at the last second.

Graceful Pitta – On the walk in we had a pair of Pittas on the narrow trail on the edge of cultivation in secondary scrub. They hopped onto the trail a number of times allowing views of all the features, especially the fine blue browline, which seems impossibly delicate against the solid black head. On the final morning we also saw a young Pitta whilst cutting through understorey tracking the Ground Cuckoos. From literature describing pre-adult plumages I assume the bird was an immature rather than very young juvenile as its brow line had turned a pale blue (not near as obvious as the adult), although the body was mottled rufous to dark brown scaled (no obvious hint of the red belly coming through) and with dark looking wings and back. There was virtually no calling activity at this site.

Galliformes - Bronze-tailed Peacock Pheasant was heard only on a couple of occasions, one close to the walk in, and then around the camp area. The only other galliforme noted was distant calling **Ferruginous Partridge** on a couple of mornings. This was well below par for other trip reports which recorded various partridges and Salvadori's Pheasant. I hope they haven't been trapped out along with the Laughingthrushes which were also completely absent during our visit.

Sumatran Green Pigeon – A near endemic being also found in the hills of West Java. This was the only green pigeon noted at Way Titias. It was seen on the walk in in a bare tree, and then heard on a couple of the mornings east of camp delivering its rather nice yodel of a call.

Cream-striped Bulbul – Seen a few times on a couple of the days, it seemed to be one of the more frequent Bulbul species at this site.

Sumatran Trogon – Seen a few times, including a couple of close views. It was heard calling, but only quietly after we had located one. I'm not sure whether they are always quiet in calling, or whether they weren't calling properly during the season we were there?

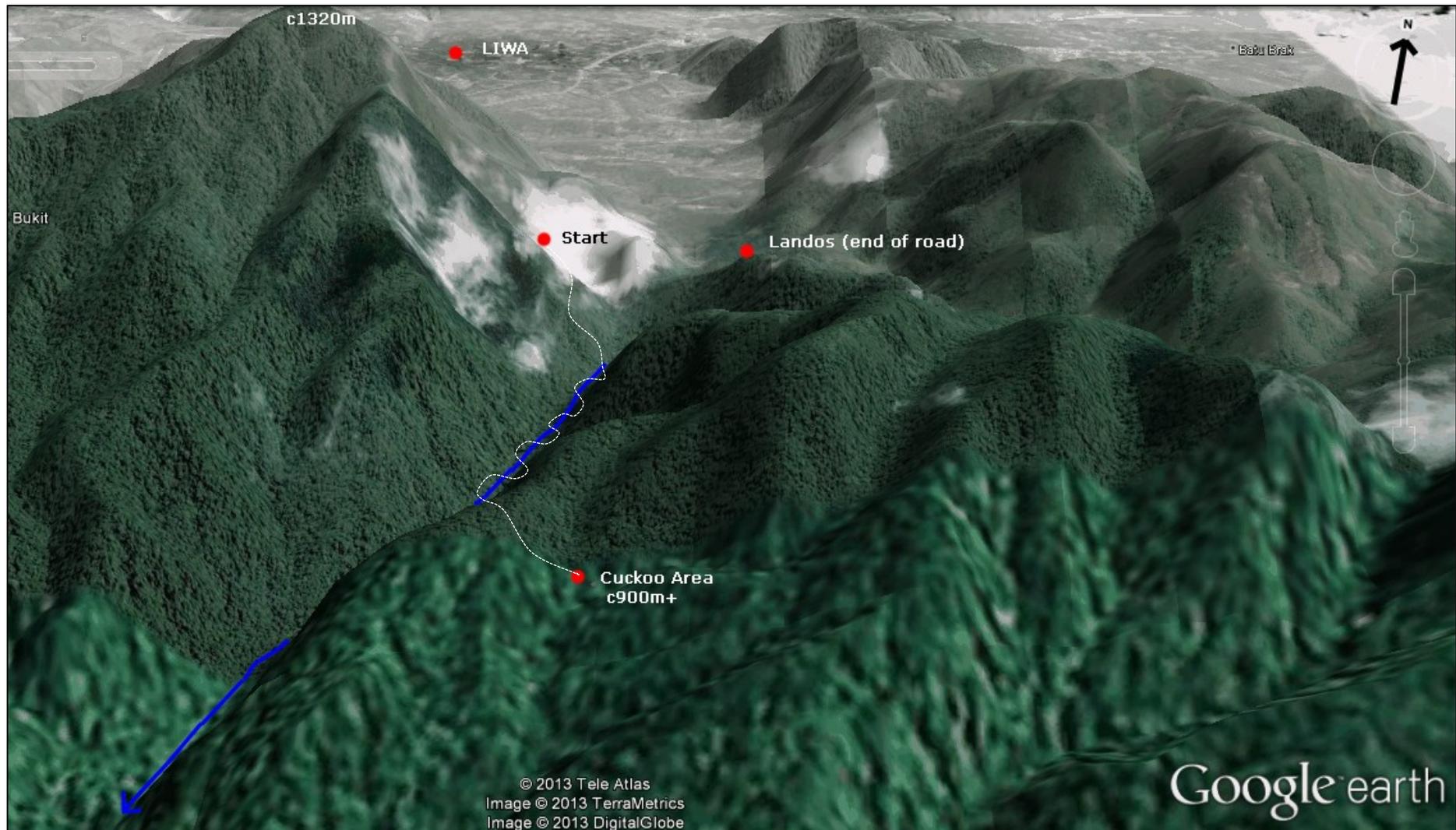
Sumatran Drongo – Seemed common at this site and the most numerous Drongo during our visit here.

Buettikofer's (Sumatran) Babbler – Was hoping to spend some time in the cultivated and secondary habitat on the edge of the forest, but our walk to Gamal's house was done in the dark, and any thoughts of birding during our walk out of the forest was curtailed by torrential rain, so in the end we only had the short time we were having breakfast at Gamal's house at dawn on the first morning here. This was enough though as there were birds calling in the scrub behind Gamal's house. During breakfast we had some reasonable views of this, until recently, little seen endemic.

Sunda Forktail – Not endemic but restricted to the hills of Sumatra and Java. This species was seen on the main river on the walk in and also around camp. All sightings I had appeared to be males as I failed to note any chestnut crowned individuals.

Other species recorded included **Black Eagle; Green-billed Malkoha; Helmeted, Rhinoceros & Bushy-crested Hornbills, Malaysian Eared Nightjar, Orange-backed & Maroon Woodpeckers; Banded & Long-tailed Broadbills; Spotted Fantail; Chestnut-backed Scimitar Babbler; Grey-throated, Spot-necked, Rufous-fronted, Golden, Horsfield's & Moustached Babblers; Eye-browed & Pygmy wren Babblers, Blue Nuthatch; Fulvous-chested Jungle Flycatcher; Ferruginous, Rufous-browed & Rufous-chested Flycatchers and Blue-winged Leafbird.**

Other interest - **Siamang** and **Agile Gibbons** were frequently heard and blonde pelage **Agile Gibbons** were noted on the first morning from camp. **Mitred Leaf Monkey** were also seen on one date (presumed to be **Southern Mitred Leaf Monkey**). **Sumatran Long-nosed Horned Frog** was also recorded not far from camp.



Map 3: Aerial showing Way Titias Area (vertical scale x 3). The start point Gamal's house is 45mins walk from the road at Landos through cultivation.

(C) Danau Ranau – Bukit Barisan Selatan NP

This site is another access to the forests within Bukit Barisan Selatan NP, just over an hour from Liwa on the south western shores of Lake Ranau. The lake is the second largest in Sumatra formed by earthquake and volcanic action, with the Barisan range passing along its western flank, cutting it off from the west coast of Sumatra. The lake itself lies at an altitude of around 500m asl. The nearby peaks of the Barisan range go up to over 1940m at their highest point, but most peaks are lower than 1500m. The accessible trail we visited, known simply as Danau Ranau or the Puncak Trail (trail to the top) in previous trip reports, went to a height of just over 1300m, with the forest starting at just over c1000m on the eastern flank overlooking the lake and down to just under 1200m on the western flank (although elsewhere along the ridge forest does come to lower elevations). The terrain map below shows the route of the trail, with a GPS plot of the ascent and decent on the other side also provided.

The trail itself is steep in places, but generally more straightforward access than the Ground Cuckoo site at Way Titias. After a night in Liwa we were driven to the start of the trail, the last section of the drive along the lake shore being along a non-metaled road. It took a few hours to climb the trail, birding along the way. For accommodation we were expecting to be camping again within the forest itself, but the guys had commandeered a wooden workers house within the edge of the Coffee plantation on the west side of the hill (the Coffee House). This had advantages and disadvantages. The main drawbacks were we were not in the forest and had a 10min walk through Coffee trees to get there so during down time at the middle of the day or during the rainy periods we were less likely to see target forest birds from camp. The walk through the plantation also usually involved getting a soaking from the Coffee trees as negotiating them necessitated brushing past wet branches. The advantages were we could spread out and not worry about rain within the dwelling, and it was going to be more comfortable than tents. Also there was the potential for seeing species over the forest canopy from the location (Hornbills, Raptors, and although we didn't maybe also the Woodcock).

Once at Danau Ranau we birded the main trail mornings and afternoons, sometimes deviating off trail, with Gamal cutting temporary trails for us. We only had one really birdy day here, where bird waves were frequent until it started raining at c3pm. The other two days were quite windy and misty and this reduced bird activity considerably. I don't know whether this is normal, due to time of year, or whether we were just unlucky, but even on the quiet days there was some action to keep us going.

Highlights from Danau Ranau:

Schneider's Pitta – Despite the previous information about Pitta activity in Feb at this site, we found out that in Feb 2013 at least this species was only marginally territorial. This was a bit of a major blow as it was the main target for all three of us! However a lot of hard work produced a couple of sightings. One was a brief sight only view of a bird by Gamal and Martin; Holger clocked some movement, and I saw nothing at all! The other sighting thankfully fell to me where I had a few seconds of a female through the binos at point blank range one afternoon (!!!). This bird was below the old camp area and stream. At this point the next morning we managed to coax two birds into song, but they were not interested in defending their territory and tactics of going in and staying patient both failed on successive mornings. The only calling birds heard were after playback and only in the first half hour of light and last half our before darkness.

Graceful Pitta – This Pitta was much more active and could be heard singing throughout the day. We taped and whistled in one individual which we saw well and then left them alone after that with no further views but regular calling along various points from the viewpoint on the east side of the hill right down to below the old camp.

Sumatran Hill Partridge – Heard only. This was frequently calling and we got close to seeing it a couple of times, but luck and judgement failed us.

Bronze-tailed Peacock Pheasant – A bird calling right by the trail on the walk up was glimpsed by Martin only otherwise this was also heard only. It is, judging by its call, relatively frequent here.

Sumatran Cochoa – Without a doubt this was the bird of the trip for all three of us. We had cracking views of a presumed male sat around watching us watching it for roughly three hours, in a stretch of forest dominated by Bamboo between the trail summit and the main viewpoint. The only other similar encounter of such a mega bird as this I can recall before was three hour views of Whitehead's Broadbill on Mount Kinabalu in 2005. Both birds basically sat tight in one location for three solid hours doing nothing! No wonder they can be hard to find. The Cochoa was even briefly in the same area on the next and final day, and then called for 45minutes as we headed back down to civilisation.

Sumatran Wren Babbler – An unexpected encounter, but great views of a single bird, and probably a second (ie pair) calling in the background. This bird was seen below the old camp area and stream crossing. Initially heard calling, with contact calls similar to Eye-browed Wren Babbler, which is probably the most frequent Wren Babbler here. Then briefly seen, and on playing a brief snatch of Long-billed Wren Babbler call the bird responded by singing and allowing prolonged on and off views. Another trip highlight.

Rusty-breasted Wren Babbler – Heard at dawn in two areas along the trail on a few occasions, but only singing briefly each time. The bird being most vocal was by the first shelter/bench down from the summit west side (Chris Gooddie's 'Graceland'), the other bird was just above the old camp/stream crossing. The bird around the first shelter down from the summit was briefly sighted in the gloom of dawn, but other than a plump silhouette I couldn't make any plumage details on it.

Marbled Wren Babbler – Heard only on the final morning, between the first shelter/bench and second down from the summit west side. This involved two territories, although both birds were only calling early morning, and were not particularly territorial.

Sumatran Treepie – Seen and heard daily.

Sumatran/Sunda Collared Owlet – Commonly heard, we saw a single bird around the summit area on the walk in.

Blue-masked Leafbird – Holger had a single in a bird wave on one day, and then the next day with much more bird activity we all recorded two pairs and a single bird during the morning in various mixed species flocks, and Martin and Holger had another bird low down whilst I was off recording Siamang calls.

Sumatran Trogon – Seen more or less daily at this site. One encounter off trail involved five birds together!

Sumatran Green Pigeon – Heard regularly a single was seen on one date.

Sumatran (Sunda) Bulbul – The commonest Bulbul here.

Sumatran Drongo – Noted but not as common as at Way Titias

Other birds included: **Black, Sunda, & Chestnut-capped Laughingthrushes; Blue Nuthatch; Black-browed & Fire-tufted Barbets; Lesser Shortwing; Pygmy & Eye-browed Wren Babblers; Black Eagle; Bushy-crested, White-crowned & Rhinoceros Hornbills; Long-tailed Broadbill; Maroon-breasted Philentoma; Grey-chinned Minivet, Blyth's Shrike Babbler, Black & Crimson Oriole; White-throated Fantail; Ashy Drongo; Green Magpie; Cinereous Tit; Ruby-throated & Cinereous Bulbuls; Yellow-bellied Warbler; Bar-winged Prinia; Grey-throated, Spot-necked, Golden & Pin-striped Tit Babblers; Long-tailed Sibia; Verditer, Rufous-browed & Pygmy Blue Flycatchers and Temminck's Sunbird.**

Misses: **Dusky Woodcock**, both endemic **Whistling-thrushes**, **Red-billed Partridge** (if occurs here?), and the endemic nightbirds (the latter due to our inertia and partly bad weather). **Sumatran Laughingthrush** was not tried for and we got the impression Gamal seems to think the chances are slim at best now (maybe that was because we didn't have 'hacking billy' with us!).

Other interest: **Yellow-throated Martin** was seen well but briefly during a mid-afternoon in the forest; **Siamang & Agile Gibbons** were both very vocal with the former seen well; **Mitred Leaf Monkey** was seen well including what appeared to be association with the Siamang; a large dark unidentified **Angle-headed** or **Forest type Dragon** with white eyes and lance shaped nuchal and dorsal spines was noted but doesn't seem to fit descriptions of existing Lizards that I can find; a **Draco Lizard**; and the terrestrial bog orchid *Habenaria medusa*, which we were lucky to catch in full flower on the forest edge during the walk up, probably at the highest point of its altitudinal range.



Map 4: Terrain mapping with illustrative route of the 'Puncak Trail' shown in blue over the Barisan range adjacent to Danau Ranau



GPS Data of the route's slope rise and distance from the Lake to the Coffee house accommodation



Danau Ranau from the main Viewpoint on the trail

Range Restricted Montane Species in Sumatra

The table below is based on Birdlife International's [Endemic Bird Area number 158](#) that covers the montane and hill diptocarp forests of Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia. Additional montane endemic species in Sumatra have been added to the bottom, and some range restricted species and proposed/accepted splits that were a target for us during this trip.

Range Restricted Species based on EBA 158	IUCN Category	Trip Total	Me
<u>Red-billed Partridge (<i>Arborophila rubrirostris</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Aceh Pheasant (<i>Lophura hoogerwerfi</i>)</u>	VU		
<u>Salvadori's Pheasant (<i>Lophura inornata</i>)</u>	VU		
<u>Bronze-tailed Peacock-pheasant (<i>Polyplectron chalcum</i>)</u>	LC	1	H
<u>Mountain Peacock-pheasant (<i>Polyplectron inopinatum</i>)</u>	VU		
<u>Crested Argus (<i>Rheinardia ocellata</i>)</u>	NT		
<u>Sumatran Green-pigeon (<i>Treron oxyurus</i>)</u>	NT	1	1
<u>Pink-headed Fruit-dove (<i>Ptilinopus porphyreus</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Sumatran Ground-cuckoo (<i>Carpococcyx viridis</i>)</u>	CR	1	H
<u>Rajah Scops-owl (<i>Otus brookii</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Short-tailed Frogmouth (<i>Batrachostomus poliophus</i>)</u>	NT		
<u>Salvadori's Nightjar (<i>Caprimulgus pulchellus</i>)</u>	NT		
<u>Waterfall Swift (<i>Hydrochous gigas</i>)</u>	NT		
<u>Sumatran Trogon (<i>Apalharpactes mackloti</i>)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Fire-tufted Barbet (<i>Psilopogon pyrolophus</i>)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Schneider's Pitta (<i>Pitta schneideri</i>)</u>	VU	1	1
<u>Graceful Pitta (<i>Pitta venusta</i>)</u>	VU	1	1
<u>Sunda Minivet (<i>Pericrocotus miniatus</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Sumatran Drongo (<i>Dicurus sumatranus</i>)</u>	NT	1	1
<u>Cream-striped Bulbul (<i>Pycnonotus leucogrammicus</i>)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Spot-necked Bulbul (<i>Pycnonotus tympanistrigus</i>)</u>	NT		
<u>Blue-wattled Bulbul (<i>Pycnonotus nieuwenhuisii</i>)</u>	DD		
<u>Orange-spotted Bulbul (<i>Pycnonotus bimaculatus</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Green-winged Bulbul (<i>Hypsipetes virescens</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Sunda Warbler (<i>Seicercus grammiceps</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Marbled Wren-babbler (<i>Turdinus marmorata</i>)</u>	LC	1	H
<u>Rusty-breasted Wren-babbler (<i>Turdinus rufipectus</i>)</u>	LC	1	H
<u>Sunda Laughingthrush (<i>Garrulax palliatus</i>)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Black Laughingthrush (<i>Garrulax lugubris</i>)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Black-capped White-eye (<i>Zosterops atricapilla</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Shiny Whistling-thrush (<i>Myophonus melanurus</i>)</u>	LC		
<u>Malaysian Whistling-thrush (<i>Myophonus robinsoni</i>)</u>	NT		
<u>Sumatran Cochoa (<i>Cochoa beccarii</i>)</u>	VU	1	1
<u>Sunda Robin (<i>Cinclidium diana</i>)</u>	LC		

<u>Sunda Forktail (Enicurus velatus)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Rufous-vented Niltava (Niltava sumatrana)</u>	LC		
<u>Blue-masked Leafbird (Chloropsis venusta)</u>	NT	1	1
<u>Mountain Serin (Serinus estherae)</u>	LC		
Additional Sumatran Montane Endemics & Range Restricted Species			
<u>Roll's (Grey-breasted) Hill Partridge (Arborophila (orientalis) rolli)</u>	LC		
<u>Sumatran(Grey-breasted)Hill Partridge (Arborophila (orientalis) sumatrana)</u>	LC	1	H
<u>Sumatran/Sunda (Asian) Collared Owlet (Glaucidium (brodiei) sylvaticum)</u>	(LC)	1	1
<u>Sumatran (Golden-fronted) Leafbird (Chloropsis (aurifons) media)</u>	LC		
<u>Ruby-throated (Black-crested) Bulbul (Pycnonotus (melanicterus) dispar)</u>	(LC)	1	1
<u>Cinereous (Ashy) Bulbul (Hypsipetes (flavala) cinereus)</u>	(LC)	1	1
<u>Sumatran (Sunda/Olive) Bulbul (Iole (virescens) sumatranus)</u>	(LC)	1	1
<u>Sumatran (Sunda) Treepie (Dendrocitta (o) occipitalis)</u>	(LC)	1	1
<u>Buettikofer's (Sumatran) Babbler (Trichastoma buettikoferi)</u>	NT	1	1
<u>Sumatran (Long-billed) Wren Babbler (Rimator (malacoptilus) albostratus)</u>	LC	1	1
<u>Sumatran (White-crested) Laughingthrush (Garrulax (leucolophus) bicolor)</u>	VU		
<u>Chestnut-winged Whistling-thrush (Myoponus castaneus)</u>	NT		
Totals	50	24	19

Final Thoughts

Firstly thanks must go to my travel companions Martin and Holger for good company and a great adventure, also to Gamal and Toni for expertly showing us around south western Sumatra, and to Martin's friend Ari for fixing our initial plans.

Looking at the list of range restricted species in the table above we managed to see a reasonable number in Bukit Barisan Selatan NP. We missed a few that other have seen here, but the two sites do not appear to have quite the diversity of that reported in trips to Gunung Kerinci (inc. the Tapan Road), presumably down to less variation in elevation at least to some extent. However in terms of having a chance at seeing a handful of the more charismatic endemics (Schneider's Pitta, Sumatran Ground Cuckoo, the galliformes, maybe Sumatran Cochoa) it is probably the better destination-certainly at present. With time a trip along the Barisan range in Sumatra would focus on all three areas of large National Parks (Bukit Barisan Selatan, G. Kerinci and G. Leuser) if you wish to maximise the opportunities to encounter as many of the range restricted species as possible.

Sumatra in the rainy season can yield good results. I hope there is some useful background information for future visitors, to compliment and add to existing information already out there.

A full species list on excel is available via [email](#).

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