

Sulawesi & Halmahera

19 September - 8 October 2011

Indonesian Tour Guides and Managers

Darwin Sumang & Nurlin Djuni

Tour Organiser

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Group Participants

Ken Chapman

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September 19 Setting Out From Home (Or So I Thought): I left home this morning to take the short flight off Islay to Glasgow. Although the previous day had been glorious sunshine, today was thick, low cloud and drizzle causing the flight to be cancelled. This was exceptionally annoying as exactly the same thing had happened on my last tour (to PNG in August) causing incredible disruption and vast extra costs to reschedule. Even more annoying was that these were the first times ever in 12 years of living on Islay that this had ever happened. I nipped back home and quickly contacted airlines, Ken (already on his way and expecting to meet up with me in Dubai) and of course the ground agents. I'd just got everything rescheduled for the same flights tomorrow at considerable cost (£500+) before it was time for me to get the next plane off the island. It was tempting to wait until the morning flight tomorrow and have an extra night at home, but it was also tempting fate in case the same should happen tomorrow. I flew off in weather that had turned into bright sunshine and got into a hotel in Glasgow for the night to await tomorrow's departure.

Others in the group were hopefully more on schedule and heading towards Indonesia.

September 20: Out From Glasgow To Dubai: My Emirates flight to Dubai set off on time and arrived about midnight local time. By now most of the others were already at the final destination of Makassar

September 21: Arrival To Makassar, Sulawesi: My onward flight from Dubai to Jakarta and transfer to the local terminal for a flight on to Makassar at 8.20pm all went OK. The final annoyance after days of being stuck in airports and airplanes, was the final leg of the journey to Makassar being delayed for 1.5 hours, so instead of arriving very late, I arrived ridiculously late – after 2pm, with a 5am start again!

September 22: Morning In Karaenta Forest, Then On To Palu and Lore Lindu: After a couple of hours sleep I was up and meeting the group at 5am as we set out in three very comfortable small minibuses the hour or so to Karaenta Forest. Once out of Makassar – a surprisingly large city – we came upon some fine remnant forest patches on very spectacular karst limestone outcrops. This is home to the localized Black-ringed White-eye, a species restricted to southern Sulawesi. Both Darwin and Nurlin were accompanying us and a bit of playback

very quickly had this special bird giving us brilliant close views. We were birding on the twisting mountain road, already with quite a few noisy trucks going up and down. But this was steep difficult terrain with no side tracks, so a slow wander downhill for an hour or so was all that could be done – and it produced some good finds. We had a good introduction to Sulawesi's avifauna, finding good looks at several Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbills, noisy Hair-crested Drongos, the odd-looking endemic Piping Crow and Azure-rumped (Blue-backed) Parrots. Grey-sided and Yellow-sided Flowerpeckers were heard often but difficult to track down, though we did glimpse both. Olive-backed and Black Sunbirds were much easier, as were many Glossy Swiftlets. Overhead as the morning rapidly heated up we found our first Woolly-necked Storks and also Spotted Kestrel and Peregrine, while Sooty-headed Bulbul was fairly commonplace and we encountered a single small flock of Dark-headed Munias.

By 10.30am we were back at the airport in Makassar to catch a flight to Palu at 12.50pm (apparently you need this seemingly excessive amount of time to make an early check-in and ensure you don't get bumped off the flight). We arrived in Palu, transferred to another trio of comfortable vehicles and began the three hour onward drive, winding up along hairpin bends into the forest and mists of Lore Lindu National Park. As we climbed, the rain came on strong at times and we had no time or incentive to do any birding along the way. We arrived at the "basic, but adequate" Sedy Guesthouse by 6.30pm, had a very good supper with a choice of tasty dishes on the table, then retired early to bed for a 5am departure tomorrow.

September 23: Birding In Lore Lindu: We set off at 5am after early morning tea and coffee, for almost an hour back up into the higher forest where we'd driven through yesterday evening on the way to our accommodation. By 6am it was light enough to start birding and the forest was full of bird calls and song. However, here as in any rainforest, birding can be frustrating and slow at times. We were hearing all sorts of things that would be lifers such as Great Shortwing, Sulawesi Thrush and Geomalia, but seeing little to start with. The jinx was broken with brief views of Slender-billed (Barred) Cuckoo-doves. Then some of us gained better views of Malia – a chunky yellow and brown bulbul-looking bird feeding on thick mossy branches like a massive nuthatch. We spent the whole morning out here, mainly walking the road (much quieter than that of yesterday). We had a welcome roadside picnic breakfast and tried at various elevations as we worked our way back towards lunch at just after midday. A variety of White-eyes were encountered, mostly with reasonable views: Streak-headed, Black-crowned (-fronted) and the more typical Mountain White-eye. Great looks were had early on of Blue-fronted Flycatcher along with Dark-eared (Lesser Sulawesi) Honeyeater – one of the Australasian families towards the edge of its range here. Little groups of birds were occasionally encountered, often far too high up in the canopy of this impressive mixed forest. With the white-eyes were Rusty-bellied Fantails, Sulphur-bellied (Yellow-vented) Whistler and Sulawesi Leaf-warblers. Mountain Tailorbirds were calling everywhere, but none encountered (apparently more time for these later). Another skulker was Chestnut-backed Bush-warbler, but we did get remarkably lucky with this one. After lots of careful peering into very dense bracken scrub just a few inches high, one broke cover and gave some splendid looks before flying across the road on its short, fluttering, rounded wings – definitely not designed for going far! White-bellied Imperial Pigeon and Fire-browed Myna were a couple of more frustrating fly-overs. However, the always tricky to find *Accipiters* did us proud this morning, with Darwin finding a superb perched up Sulawesi Sparrowhawk which gave prolonged close-ups. Later on after walking the short distance down to Lake Tambing we found a gorgeous Small Sparrowhawk, again giving phenomenal views as it ate dragonflies it had caught on short sorties into the forest. The lake itself produced first Sunda Teal and in forest nearby, some brilliant perched up, full-frame Red-eared Fruit-dove studies. Cuckoo-shrikes/Cicadabirds were much in evidence this morning too, with scope views of the distinctive Cerulean Cuckoo-shrike and the more typically coloured Sulawesi Cicadabird. Other great finds included three perched-up Sulawesi Pygmy Woodpeckers at one spot, several Island Verditer Flycatchers and a pretty little Citrine Canary-flycatcher were showing extremely well and there was a stunning fly-by of huge Knobbed Hornbills.

The weather had been dry and pleasantly cool all morning, warming up a little only towards the end of our time. Back for a varied set of dishes for lunch, we took a break for 2-3 hours in what was now the real “heat of the day”. Off at 3pm back to where we were this morning proved quite productive. We basically just wandered down the paved trail to the lake again. As we pulled up in the vehicles a pair of apparently quite elusive Sulawesi Thrushes were feeding just like European Blackbirds at the side of the road. With this as a great start we wandered down the track and found a few very high canopy Fire-browed Mynas. On further and we tried playback for Greater Shortwing to no avail, but then took the side track where had tried for Geomalia this morning. After a lot of patient, quiet waiting and watching I got very lucky and saw the bird well as it hopped up from dense ground cover onto a fallen log and then off again. Sadly, despite further intense watching it did not reappear for the others. After this we watched briefly at the lake edge where everyone got much better looks at perched up Fire-browed Mynas on a dead tree. Back at the vehicles as light was dwindling in a still dry afternoon, we took tea and coffee and cookies, before going back past the accommodation to a stake-out for owls. Nurlin, Darwin and good local lad Idris all had this well sewn-up. As we stopped by a couple of tall dead trees we could hear Barn Owl-like hissings and quickly saw a pair of excellent Sulawesi Masked Owls – like dingy barn owls. These popped back and forth several times giving great scope looks. Close by was a Sulawesi Scops-owl calling and this came in quickly and again gave wonderful looks through the scope. We were back for supper by 7.30pm amidst a swarm of flying ants in the open dining area. A quick log to register all the day's excellent finds and it was bedtime by 9pm for an even earlier start (4.30am) tomorrow back to the same forest area for hopefully further great birds.

September 24: More Birding In Lore Lindu – Taking A Hike: Our departure this morning was on schedule except for Ken who was inadvertently locked in the room by an over-keen guide. We all arrived at the trail-head together in the dark, but dawn rapidly crept up before we'd seen any sign of the hoped-for boobooks. We tried hard for Great Shortwing on the roadside for a while, hearing the bird close, but never showing. Then it was 6am and time to start our planned 2-2.5 mile each way hike up into the forested hills. This took up the entire morning as we walked slowly up and back, stopping for birds and having an al fresco picnic breakfast at 7am along the way – complete with little squares of linoleum to sit on to save us getting wet backsides! The weather was fine – cool to start, pleasantly shaded under the canopy, and only becoming hotter towards the very end of our hike. It was quite steep and a bit slippery in places, but generally not too bad, though the birding was very slow indeed. The main goal of the trek was to find Olive-flanked Whistler – or *Hylocitrea*. It is not a particularly amazing bird to look at, but, for reasons unknown to any of us mere mortals, it is sufficiently “different” to be in a family entirely of its own. As Clive is striving to see all of the World's bird families this was a “big one”. Luckily we did connect with the bird this morning, some of us gaining reasonable views of a mid-sized, chunky, olive green passerine – not as impressive as other single species families such as Kagu or Shoebill, but of equal status. Much spiffier were several good sightings of the lovely Purple-bearded Bee-eater; a forest bird nesting in holes in erosion-cut banks. The Sulawesi Myzomela was also seen well by myself, and a few other odds and ends added to a short list of species seen for a lot of effort. On the way back at just after midday, Nurlin called a halt to our fleet of vehicles and pointed out a lovely flock of bright Grosbeak Mynas in a roadside tree.

Lunch at 1pm was followed by a short break, then out again back to the track to the lake to check out Geomalia and other species still missing. Before going all the way back up the road, now becoming all too familiar and anticipating every pothole, we paused at some more open farmland adjacent to the forest edge of the National Park. Here were very recently cleared areas of forest with people constructing simple wooden dwellings – classic deforestation for a land-hungry population, but all apparently legitimate. We scored a number of good birds here and ended up spending an hour or more wandering the wide track towards a village, with friendly people on motorbikes passing by every now and again. Darwin called in a superb pair of Sulawesi Blue Flycatchers, and close by were a pair of the bright little Citrine Canary-Flycatchers. Occasional remaining giant trees had Grey-headed Green Pigeons in them and another held a mixed group of Short-tailed

Starlings, Fire-browed Myna and Black Sunbird. Back at the road we found a distant fruiting tree high on the forest clad hills where up to 10 Knobbed Hornbills were feeding along with further of the Grey-headed Pigeons and several excellent looks at White-bellied Imperial Pigeons. We eventually got up the way to check out the Geomalia site, but it was dusk by now. I didn't bother going in and got lucky with a pair of Little Pied Flycatchers while waiting. We finished with an attempt after dark of finding the Diabolical Nightjar as we'd missed it at roost today. No luck here, as the traffic may well have disturbed any chance of them settling on the road in the headlights.

A quick, but again very tasty supper was followed by a bird-list and straight to bed to rise again at the ungodly hour of 4.30am again tomorrow as we exit this pleasant enough area of forest.

September 25: Morning Birding Lore Lindu National Park, Then Return To Palu: We were packed and into our vehicles at 4.30am after a snack breakfast. We headed back up to where Cinnamon Boobook is found, but close to the spot our vehicle got a puncture. We popped out here and tried playback, but had no luck. We walked down the road awhile and the vehicles caught us up and transported us to the track to the lake, which we were to visit a couple of times this morning. We took the hike down and tried for Geomalia to no avail, but did see perched up Yellow-and-Green Lorikeet, Sulawesi Blue-Flycatcher, and small bird parties of the "usual" stuff. Our regular Sulawesi Thrush was hopping about at the roadside again early on. Here we also got our first good views of Sulawesi Babbler and further looks at the ubiquitous Mountain Tailorbird. We did further strolls along various sections of road working forest and open area to try our luck and try and coincide with our "targets". One of these was Pygmy Cuckoo-shrike, which eventually showed up well for us. Malia was also seen on a couple of occasions – not brilliant looks, but a good catch-up for everyone. At one point a Spotted-tailed Goshawk that we'd been hearing clearly and trying to call in, dashed across the road. We were slowly notching up new birds and took a break for a second brief breakfast. Our final departure towards Palu was on roadside open areas with low cover to seek out Diabolical (Satanic or Heinrich's) Nightjar that we'd missed on our long hike yesterday. Nurlin got out and wandered into a patch and immediately flushed a couple of very dark, almost totally plain-winged nightjars – Bingo! Unfortunately I was the only one out of the vehicles, so a couple missed them and others got brief flight shots. We now began to motor and in the heat of the late morning, I think many of us took the opportunity to take a snooze after such an early start. We arrived for lunch at a pleasant little place along the "Main Road" between Palu and where we'd come from (Wausa), but in reality it seemed more like a tiny rural back-road. However a pleasant lunch of chicken, greens and rice was served before we carried on to the outskirts of Palu for our final birding. By now it was 2.30pm and ferociously hot down here in the lowlands, but we stuck with it for a series of further targets that Darwin and Nurlin had in mind. A fairly unassuming patch of open country with low scrub immediately produced multiple super views of Savannah Nightjars. Here too after a fair bit of watching and searching we all saw reasonable looks at Pale-headed Munias (along with Chestnut and Dark-headed), plus a pair of White-shouldered Trillers. Also here were many easy to see and brightly colourful Blue-tailed Bee-eaters and a few Yellow-bellied White-eyes. The heat caught up with us by 3.30pm and the thoughts of a decent hotel and a cool shower was too much to resist any longer. We set off and were at a very pleasant Swiss-Bell Hotel by 4.30pm to spend a luxurious evening in great comfort before another day of travel tomorrow to reach the north of Sulawesi starting at 4.30am.

September 26: Fly To Manado, Then On To Tangkoko Nature Reserve: Up at 4.30am and away after breakfast at 5.15am to the nearby airport. It was already quite warm before the sun came up! This was a day of unavoidable travel – having to get to airports early to ensure space on confirmed flights combined with there being no direct connections north from Palu to Manado, meant we had to fly all the way south the Makassar to fly back north again with a 4+ hour wait. Hence much of the day was lost in travel and waiting in a quite comfortable executive lounge at Makassar with free food and internet.

I managed to get an exit row seat for the flight to Manado, the regular seating being styled on a much shorter Indonesian clientèle, making it physically impossible for me to fit into the seat at all. On arrival we found another fleet of three comfortable vehicles with drivers awaiting us and quickly set off the hour or so out of a really quite pleasant, clean and seemingly thriving small city. Before long we were out into the countryside of coconut plantations and mixed, dry, lowland forest, arriving at Tangkoko and a basic, but very friendly lodge close to the seashore by about 4.30pm. Without hanging about, we got checked in and set ourselves ready for a late evening excursion with the local guides that Nurlin and Darwin use here. A short drive into the coastal forest was followed by a hike in the fast fading light to a specific tree. This took us past several lifers – Purple-winged roller and Green-backed Kingfisher being especially good, colourful birds. We halted in the dark by a tree with a small hole at about eye-level. The local guide has this well staked-out, as, after we were all gathered together he spotlighted an amazing little Spectral (Pygmy) Tarsier, which we had wonderful long looks at, finding a second close by and managing some great photographs too. On our return from this magical encounter with such a special and unique little creature, an early primate (seen so close in the scope we could get all the detail of its amazing little hands and feet!), we stopped at another hole in a tree where a huge black tarantula (plus tiny male?) lurked. Back by 7pm, with an excellent supper to follow, then a welcome cold shower before getting to bed exhausted again by 8.30 – 9pm.

September 27: Birding Tangkoko: The day started with a “leisurely” 5.am breakfast and away by 5.30am, back to the National Park entrance area, just a short distance away. We first stopped and watched in an open camp site area. Best birds here were a fly-over of a flock of Golden-naped Racquet-tails – at last seen, including the distinctive and odd Racquet-shaped central tail feather projection. Here too was a good look at a quietly perched up Black-naped Fruit-dove – a really bright little bird with red and yellow under-tail coverts and a yellow chin. We then took off for the rest of the morning to wander into the dry forest areas. It turned out to be an excellent morning – hot as hell, but very productive. The system was great with Bobby, the lodge owner acting as main local bird guide and two other local guides all wandering through the forest in different areas and keeping in touch by mobile phone when they found us the goodies. We had numerous really good, often multiple sightings in great detail with plenty of time to study each species. And the species were really classy! We had three species of Kingfisher – Lilac-cheeked, Green-backed and Sulawesi Dwarf – each one a gem in its own way. A lot of activity revolved around early sightings of Yellow-billed Malkoha where we also found Bay Coucal and Ashy Woodpecker – the latter seen as a superb family of three birds on a couple of occasions. One of our local guides found us a splendid Red-backed Thrush – one of the lovely, secretive forest floor *Zoothera* thrushes with gorgeous black and white markings on its front. Another guide, a little later, found a pair of roosting (and not so often encountered) Ochre-bellied Boobooks – how on earth they do it baffles me. The owls in particular gave such close views we could watch the mosquitoes landing on their faces (happily, after spraying ourselves liberally with various noxious substances, the insects kept their distance from us). The only bird to lead us a real song and dance was a Black-billed Koel calling loudly and frantically for much of the morning and responding to playback at times, but only ever giving fleeting views high in the magnificently buttressed *Ficus* trees.

We had a very tasty lunch at about midday and were off again by 1pm with no time for a siesta in the heat of the day. We popped down in the vehicles to the coast and waited on a black volcanic sand beach until three outrigger boats were prepared for us to run around the coast a short distance to potter up a mangrove creek in search of further special birds. By and large this worked really well – most notably for additional Kingfisher species, especially several Great-billed or Black-billed Kingfishers. The tally today was 7 kingfisher species, including 4 lifers for me – a record on all counts. Also out here in the open water were feeding groups of terns – 5 species in total: Little, Whiskered, Black-naped, Great Crested and *longipennis* race of Common with an all black bill. Various other odds and ends of herons, frigatebirds and shorebirds added to the group list for the tour. Once back from this pleasant jaunt by 5pm, we went straight back to the camp ground where we'd started this morning, to check out the area for nightjars at dusk. On arrival one of our local guides hurried us

over to see a pair of lovely and very distinctive White-necked Mynas. Then we waited for the nightjars, whilst being taunted by unseen Barred Rails and Isabelline Bush-hen. As dusk encroached close to 6pm we saw several OK looks at Great-eared Nightjar with its distinctive large shape and whistling call. Playback for Sulawesi Nightjar eventually paid off with a single decent brief look of one bird popping in to investigate. This species is a recent split from Large-tailed, but apparently has a distinctively different call.

Back to the lodge by just after 6pm we thought it was all over for the day, but lodge owner Bobby had us rush to the dining area to spotlight a superb Speckled Hawk-Owl up on a branch nearby – a fantastic end to a very full and exciting day's birding.

September 28: Travel From Tangkoko To Dumoga Bone: Early morning birding took the form of a 5am departure up to an overlook across the forest about 20 minutes or so from the lodge. We simply rolled up here about 5.30am (by which time it was light) and stood about watching what came in or flew by. This kept us gainfully employed until we returned to the lodge at about 8.30am, by which time it had heated up and the bird activity was on the decrease. In the intervening 3 hours we had splendid period of great activity and many wonderful views of a wide range of species and a bunch of additions to our list (“Yip-Yip” as Field Guides apparently say). Fairly soon after arriving the drivers set out a basic breakfast outside what appeared to be a rough block hut. This turned out to be a cigarette and Molotov Cocktail (petrol for sale in Coke bottles) seller's house. He appeared bleary-eyed and presumably wondered in Indonesian what the heck was going on with a bunch of noisy foreign birders having an *al fresco* breakfast at 6am in his front garden. He was extremely good-humoured about the whole thing – I hope someone offered him a cup of tea and a biscuit for the upheaval. The birding here this morning was really first class. So many great sightings, all of birds perched up in fantastic morning light giving prolonged definitive studies. Sulawesi Crested Myna sat in a tree with a White-faced cuckoo-dove (Sulawesi Black Pigeon). Groups of Green and White (Silver-tipped) Imperial Pigeons were observed on many occasions – all in the canopy conveniently below our viewpoint. Grey-headed Green Pigeons were similarly obliging and gorgeous in the morning light as they swallowed copious amounts of bright orange fruits off the trees. Both Knobbed and Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbills put in star appearances. A pair of White-rumped (Sulawesi) Trillers perched up on top of the trees for all to see along with occasional sunbirds and flowerpeckers and flocks of Finch (Thick)-billed Mynas flashing those marvellous crimson-streaked rumps. Parrots were on good form too, with (finally) a perched look at Golden-mantled Racquet-tail where we could actually define the small buffy patch on the lower neck/upper mantle. We also had multiple good looks at the Sulawesi Hanging-Parrot and the Pygmy Hanging-Parrot, both brilliant apple green with red patches hither and thither. Further amazingly colourful spectacles were provided by several fantastic Purple-winged Rollers. We were given the run-around for a long while by an Isabelline Bush-hen, but bit-by-bit people gained looks as it crept in and out of thick hilltop undergrowth and responded to Nurlin's playback. Finally we all caught up with it when it came onto the edge of a path and began eating seeds from an obviously much-favoured plant. It stayed for ages giving full-frame close-ups for all to admire just how isabelline it was! As yesterday, the local guides were a great help and were keen to help us find birds throughout.

We returned to Tangkoko Lodge and had a quick wash and brush-up, packed, took a tea or coffee, paid drinks bills, left a “thank-you” for our bird guides and set off on the long drive to our next destination - Bogani Nani Wartabone (formerly known Dumoga Bone). This took more or less the remainder of the day, arriving in the town of Kotamobagu by 5pm. The plan had changed for the better yet again – due to the care and diligence of Darwin and Nurlin. Instead of staying at the guesthouse closer to the National Park, we were now staying in the town of Kotamobagu and the quite reasonable Senator Hotel, which has a much nicer standard of rooms – a proper hotel with hot showers! En route we stopped in the seemingly vast and sprawling Manado for lunch overlooking the sea and took an age working along roads sometimes quite smooth, flat and fast and at other times steep, swerving and broken. Just watching the world go by (mostly on motorbikes) was an interesting break during our continued full-on schedule. The driving style here is a constant source of fascination, amazement and horror – though everybody seems very good natured about being cut-up, horns tooting and

vehicles swerving. We had another lovely meal outside in the garden of the hotel restaurant before getting to bed even earlier tonight for an even earlier start tomorrow – leaving at 4am!

September 29: Dumoga Bone: Departure was prompt at 4am, with an hour's drive to reach the protected Maleo site at Tambun, near the Dumogabone National Park. This is one of Sulawesi's most enigmatic birds laying their huge eggs colonially in the ground in areas where the soil is heated volcanically (we put our hands into a little stream we crossed here – and it was probably too hot to shower in!). This way the eggs can be left to incubate for 60+ days by themselves completely unattended and the youngsters are able to fly strongly almost as soon as they come out of the egg! Unfortunately predation, especially by humans, takes a massive toll (almost all the nesting grounds are known to the local people). This nowadays seems a bit of an evolutionary dead end, but we were there as dawn came to be guided the short distance into the Park by local rangers and guides in hopes of seeing the species. With us were a group of 8-10 birders from UK who had failed to see them yesterday, and were leaving for home tomorrow, so they were particularly eager to get it right this early morning. Happily we all got it right and ended up with several reasonable views of this oddity of a bird (ungraciously called “knobhead” by Myrna) as they sat up in their tree roosts before venturing to the ground for the day. As this endeavour drew to a favourable conclusion the “team” - our drivers, guides, Anna the mobile chef *et al* appeared at the open viewpoint and started cooking an unexpected breakfast for us – there is nothing like a double fried egg sandwich for breakfast after ticking such a great lifer! At Tambun many of the Maleo eggs are taken to be reared in the safety of a hatchery (at the viewpoint where we were having brekkers). This ensures a considerably higher success rate than in the wild. Our local ranger showed us one of the massive eggs he'd dug up and put into the protected area. He then showed us the hatchery where a Maleo had hatched a day or so ago and was fluttering around ready for release. He got it out, showed it to us then allowed me the honour of setting it free. Following breakfast we did a circuit walking through the dry forest seeking out Red-bellied Pitta. This turned out to be a breeze, with a pair called in and the male causing synchronised and universal “wows” from us all.

After all this excitement we returned to the vehicles and drove some distance around the edge of the Park to reach other birding areas. As we went, we paused at the open rice paddies to view lovely Java Pond Herons and passed some basic gold mining enterprises – the gold being extracted from bags of soil dug out of a hill some miles away and driven on motorbike to this spot – “labour intensive” is an understatement. The remainder of the morning, as it got hotter and hotter and seemingly 100% humidity, was spent birding from the roadside through forest and open areas on the edge of the Park where people were carving out little patches with chainsaws and hard labour from the hillsides. We had a good list of further species including very close Sulawesi Crested and White-necked Mynas. Further away were the long sought-after White-backed Woodswallows. The area seemed good for raptors and we managed several Sulawesi Serpent Eagles before bagging a dark pair of Sulawesi Hawk-Eagles.

By 11.30am it was stiflingly hot and we made tracks the short distance to the place we were originally going to use as accommodation – Tante Min Guesthouse. The place was quite pleasant and would have made a perfectly tolerable place to stay, but is a bit small for our group. The owners were very gracious in providing another fabulous lunch of varied, tasty dishes and allowing us to sit out the heat of the day until 3pm. In fact they allowed us to sleep off the heat of the day if we wished, with access to the bedrooms for a siesta - but as everyone knows “The British detest a siesta”, so I stayed awake and did crosswords instead.

At 3pm we all arose and took a short drive up a very small, obscure and poor track to arrive at the main entrance to the Dumoga Bone National Park. Here were a series of quite impressive buildings – Visitor Centre and Accommodation, but looking quite under-used and sadly, a little dilapidated. We took a walk for the remainder of the afternoon, first crossing the wide, but shallow river by bamboo floating pontoon. This was dragged across to the other side with 4-5 of us standing on it by two guys up to their wastes in water. Once over we took a trail within the forest for much of the time except for cut clearings where you could actually

get a view of what you were walking through. It was a useful and interesting experience to be actually in the forest, though of course it was darned tricky to see any birds. Parrots of various sorts were calling from the canopy and it was only in the clearings, or later when we stood out on the forest edge, that we saw any. We obtained good looks at yet another of the many Cuckoo-shrikes of the region – this one a dapper Pied. Some of us garnered brief looks at Ornate Lorries and Azure-rumped (Blue-backed) Parrots, while there were several fly-bys of Golden-mantled Racquet-tails. Perhaps best bird was a lone Spotted Harrier wandering past before it was time for us to turn back and get out of the forest before it got dark. Back at the car park the crew had laid out tea coffee and snacks including delicious pineapple and mango for us. We ate this and all decided that after the lavish lunch and days of being treated to large lunches and suppers, today was the day to drop supper all together. We set off back towards Kotamobagu at 6.15pm and had an “exciting” ride of 1.5 hours back through swerving unlit motorbikes and obscured pedestrians on narrow lanes through the open rice padis. We all disappeared to our rooms tired after an extremely long and very hot and humid day, each clutching a cool bottle of Bintang as a well-deserved liquid supper.

September 30: Birding Gunung Ambang: Away at 5am this morning to spend a good chunk of the day birding the steep forested hillsides of Gunung Ambang – somewhere off in a different direction to Dumoga Bone N.P. It was a short drive out of town before we turned off onto a small, narrow and potholed side road climbing steeply into the hills. Some steeper sides were still forested, but quite a lot was felled and turned into very productive farmland. Further up and we arrived at a wide open plateau region that was totally cleared and the rich volcanic soils used for vegetables such as cabbages, potatoes, onions and maize. The area had quite a few small houses and we turned again here onto a farm track that deteriorated rapidly into something that many people would give up on - even in a 4WD. Our intrepid drivers continued on over huge ruts, bumps, rocks and encroaching vegetation to arrive high up at the forest edge for our morning's exercise! Exercise it was indeed, as we set off up a track; fairly steep at times, muddy at times, narrow at times – at times all three – into the quite dense forest. It was terribly slow to start with, few birds heard or seen and everyone concentrating on the track ahead. Nurlin and the local guide were looking out especially for Scaly Kingfisher and later, at higher elevations the drab, but very localised endemic Matinan Flycatcher. Neither showed and not much else did to start with. We tried playback here and there, tried another spot for each species, then “one further spot” then “one last spot” going on upwards until 10am or just after. The one saving grace about all this was that it was a fairly cool temperature and not too humid. Along the way we did begin to pick up a few looks at a small but increasing range of birds. Ironically on the way back down, after we'd failed to call in a clearly heard Matinan Flycatcher, Nurlin spotted one by the trail and we all got quite reasonable views. Despite further tries we didn't connect with the Scaly Kingfisher. By the end of the morning, arriving back at the vehicles by about 12.15pm we had in fact seen a good list of stuff – but hard earned: Cerulean Cuckooshrike, Mountain Tailorbird, Sulawesi Leaf Warbler, Sulphur-bellied (Yellow-vented) Whistler, Black-crowned and Streak-headed White-eyes, Sulawesi Babbler, Malia, Citrine Flycatcher, Grey-sided Flowerpecker, Lesser and Greater Sulawesi Honeyeaters, Lesser Coucal; and Koel - heard only of course!

From here we returned down the worst of the rutted farm tracks to the small village where our local guide had his home. Here all laid out for us was a lovely lunch – we'd earned it! By 2pm we were returning to town and taking a break for an hour or so in the hotel before doing some “easy” roadside birding on rice padis close to town. After all the hard work in the forest this morning, this seemed an appealing alternative for a short afternoon. We popped out at 4.30pm and stopped at some roadside fields where Nurlin knew Java Sparrows came in to roost. We stopped here and watched for about 45 minutes until returning to the hotel by about 6pm. Apart from amusing the locals passing by in their cars, on motorbikes and motorbike taxis, we amused ourselves with views of fly-over Chestnut Bitterns, White-browed Crakes and the hoped for Java Sparrows amongst other odds and ends. Supper was at 7pm in the hotel, preceded by two days bird-list.

October 1: Kotamobagu Back To Manado Via Tomohon In The Minahasa Highlands: We had a ridiculously late start this morning after all the ridiculously early ones so far! We were away from the hotel by 7.45am and

drove for a couple of hours, working our way back towards Manado along the coast. A mid-morning coffee and tea break on the coast by a little bay with mangrove fringing was welcome. We stretched legs and walked the beach in a very hot and humid sunshine finding Grey-tailed Tattler, Common Sandpiper and a nest of Plain-throated Sunbirds. The local ladies here were greatly amused by our telescopes, binoculars and digital cameras. Further on and we were having lunch at a pleasant open restaurant overlooking extensive rice pads by midday. Here were good looks at White-browed Crake and Buff-banded Rail along with Nutmeg Mannikins (Scaly Munias) and Java Sparrows. Shorebirds were a bit thin on the ground – mainly Wood Sandpipers. Then it was another couple of hour's driving to divert up into the hills to pass through Tomohon. Looking at the map the distances all looked very insignificant, but it had taken us the best part of the day to get here! We began climbing steeply into the Minahassa Highlands here, passing through Tomohon, which I'm sure none of us had ever heard of before, but, like so many other places in Sulawesi is quite a substantial and sprawling town, full of life. We paused to admire the construction of “kit houses” - beautiful wooden homes with verandas, balustrades and intricate carving that are carefully dismantled, flat-packed and shipped to wherever they are required. We went inside one and found it to be lovely to look at, but a bit thin on insulation for our climates. However, a very large and ornate house was priced at a mere \$12,000 – what a bargain! On this drive we also came across some large, drab, windowless buildings with just small holes in designed to attract the swiftlets to breed. These had calls of the swiftlets being blasted out on loudspeaker as further encouragement. The reason for this seemingly benevolent bird-lovers act was of course to harvest the nests for birds-nest soup. Why anyone would want to eat a very expensive bowl of heated up bird spit baffles me, but lets hope they harvest the nests after breeding has been completed so there is a win-win situation for bird and man. The trio of vehicles made another intrepid climb up into the hills full of wonderful productive volcanic soils growing more prize cabbages, cucumbers and strawberries. We stopped at a point that Nurlin knew to be a likely spot for Scaly-breasted Kingfisher and began our search. While looking, we were called by our keenest driver Albert who had already found the bird! Amazing eyesight had spotted this quiet and skulking bird perched up in the thick forest. Happily it stayed plenty long enough to get to see it through the scope as we inelegantly crashed through the undergrowth to get there. We continued our birding by walking slowly up the road/track to the top where a trek apparently starts to the summit of this hill, which is still volcanically active. We saw a few more birds, most notably Rufous-throated Flycatcher. We waited in this area until a 5.45-6pm dusk to try and see again Diabolical Nightjar. Again, Nurlin had an exact stake out and we stood along the roadside and waited as darkness fell and he played the bird's call. We did have success – but only as a brief fly-by in the gloaming rather than the perched views he had hoped for.

After this finale it was time to start another 2 hours of driving to reach Manado for an overnight stay at our posh resort hotel on the coast. This was another fascinating, almost indescribable driving experience that left us all pinching ourselves at the end to ensure it had really happened. Indonesia has a lot more people in it than you think! It is not all remote and uninhabited – even Sulawesi, which sounds as if it should be. There seemed to be people everywhere on this journey – not chaotically like in India, but just an even spread along the road, even between towns and villages. Everyone is so good-natured here that what would devolve into acute road rage anywhere in “the west”, is just either ignored or accepted with a smile here. Cars cutting each other up; myriads of motorbikes weaving in and out left right and centre; people sat chatting in the pitch black on poorly lit roads inches from cars roaring past – yet completely unperturbed; horns tooting, but always in a “friendly” non-aggressive way; roads blocked off for a funeral, or a party – or for kids playing football; 2,3,even 4 people on a motorbike with no lights, no crash helmets and wiggling down the road between trucks; a complete labyrinth of roads, none properly lit or signposted at all, and none indicating any right of way at crossroads and junctions: all this, yet everything seeming to get by, function and do so in a positive sort of way – truly amazing! We arrived at the hotel by 8.10pm, got our rooms, had a quick buffet supper and crashed.

October 2: Flight To Ternate And On By Boat To Sidangoli, Halmahera: This was a second leisurely morning with a breakfast at about 7.30-8am, ready to leave for the airport by just after nine. The wonderfully cool air-conditioning in the rooms was a real haven in heat already building up to plain “uncomfortable” by 7.30am. Some wandered the extensive grounds of this pleasant resort. Myrna and I walked out to the end of a substantial pier used for the Dive School and looked out over more small islands – some just volcanic cones, but each with a village and the inevitable, inappropriately huge church dominating. We saw a sea snake in the mangrove shallows and a Pacific Reef-Heron or two. Darwin had gone ahead two days back to trouble-shoot all the fiddly arrangements in Ternate and Halmahera, so we went off in Nurlin's capable hands for a final journey with our trusted drivers to the airport, 45 minutes away for a midday flight. Check-in was straightforward and we were eating lunch by 11am (the awkward scheduling of flights and early birding has meant some odd meal times on this trip!). Despite its small size, Ternate (a separate island which is the administrative capital of the Lesser Moluccas and formerly hugely important as a centre of trade for the world-wide fights for spice trading) is where we fly to reach adjacent Halmahera. All of The Moluccas were/are famed as the ‘Spice Islands’ and in the 15th and 16th centuries completely dominated the world trade in cloves, nutmeg and mace. We made the short boat crossing to Sidangoli in the north of Halmahera in a privately chartered large covered motorboat taxi taking about an hour. The most interesting sighting on the way was small flocks of wintering Red-necked Phalaropes out on the sea – far away from their freezing Arctic breeding grounds: what a lot of the world these birds see, and what contrasting temperatures! As we neared Halmahera we slowed and Nurlin and Darwin had the boat driver go close to the mangrove for Beach Kingfisher. We got lucky and found a couple of these very large white kingfishers with blue backs – splendid bright creatures, but remarkably well camouflaged what with all the blue plastic bags and bits of white styrofoam washed up in the mangroves. It makes you wonder if they have recently evolved to be blue and white to mimic the plastic trash. The specific scientific name should perhaps be *leuco-ceruleaplasticoides*? On arrival into the port at Sidangoli it was only a minute or two around the corner to the guest house – basic, but manageable for a couple of nights. It was still remarkably hot and humid, but Nurlin had us out in the three very smart vehicles up the logging road out of town within 15 minutes. This last hour or so of daylight proved very productive with a sudden quick rush of new species – fantastic views of apparently common roadside Blue-and-White Kingfishers. Some good perched views of Red-cheeked Parrots, plus fly-by Chattering Lorikeets and Eclectus Parrots. Splendid views of yet another Fruit Dove (Grey-headed) were much appreciated. A little later we had the first distant but acceptable looks at White Cockatoos and amazing Blyth's Hornbills. Up here at even a slight elevation it was noticeably and very pleasantly cooler and much appreciated. By nightfall (later here with the hour's difference) we had our first try for Halmahera's impressive selection of night-birds. We tried for Moluccan Scops-Owl, Large-tailed Nightjar and the weird and elusive Moluccan Owlet-Nightjar – sadly all heard very well, but none showing despite Nurlin and Darwin's best efforts and the local expertise of our new local guide for Halmahera called Iskander. By 7.30pm we called it quits and returned to the accommodation, having a good meal and catch up on 2 days bird list before falling into bed by 9-9.30pm after pouring copious mounts of cold water over us to try and cool down in the continued stifling heat admirably described by Ken as “hotter than Satan's crotch”

October 3: Birding Around Sidangoli, Then On To Subaim: Halmahera is by far the largest island of the Moluccan archipelago with a contorted shape not unlike a small version of Sulawesi. Halmahera also lies further to the east of Wallace's Line than Sulawesi and consequently its avifauna contains a higher proportion of Australasian elements. We were out by 4.30am this morning looking again for some of the nocturnal delights, but the three species we “heard only” last night were “ditto” this morning. To rub salt into the wound we also heard Sombre Kingfisher and Ivory-breasted Pitta. By dawn we were having a basic breakfast in the field and hoping for better things to come in the daylight. Ken had better things in the form of a Spectacled Whistler and first sighting of Common Paradise-Kingfisher while the rest of us struggled, peered and mostly missed them. A Golden Bulbul put in a decent appearance for all of us and a White-streaked Friarbird for some. Then a good looking White-eyed (Spectacled) Imperial Pigeon and gorgeous Golden Whistler was called

in and brightened up the outlook. We eventually moved on in our vehicles, heading all the time down the coastline towards Subaim. A couple of further stops were made at places known to Iskander and Nurlin. Here we came across large viewable flocks of Metallic Starlings and finally a sort of reasonable view of the Paradise-Kingfisher for everyone.

The countryside seemed very much more rural than Sulawesi, with large tracts of forest for miles along the steep hill ranges that form the spines of the various “fingers” of land comprising the island. We progressed down a decent tarmac road for a long way and eventually called in at a small village to eat our picnic lunch. We all assumed that there had been some pre-arrangement to stop and use this village home as our base, but apparently Nurlin had just seen a decent looking place and called out to the gracious lady owner if we could just drop in! She agreed, provided chairs, tables, plates and even coffee after the meal – extraordinary impromptu hospitality unlikely to be experienced anywhere in the West. This turned out to be a thoroughly pleasant interlude with lots of kids coming to see the “strange foreigners” and make some sort of dialogue with us. Lots of photos were taken and information exchanged with these delightful people before we reluctantly said our farewells. Further down the way the road deteriorated and made us again realise why short road distances on the map can take up a major part of the day. Eventually at one point the road “disappeared” all together in that there were major road works and eventual repairs done in a somewhat “gung-ho” fashion causing the entire width of the “road” to be a total field of boulders – real chunks of rock 6-9” square with no attempt to provide a path through. Any lesser vehicles or drivers would have had to turn around and go the several hours back to where they had come from without any warning of this being there. But our drivers managed to get the vehicles (which are not 4WD) across and out the other side. After this adventure into what seemed increasingly remote Halmahera we came out to Subaim and found ourselves inexplicably back on a flat, smooth, paved road and driving through an extensive area of rice padis and neat houses, larger and well-maintained buildings stretching along the roadside for miles. Perplexing to know what makes this place tick or be so apparently important. On arrival into this thriving area we came into increasingly glowering storm clouds with bolts of lightning shorting out down to earth. We also came upon a rice padi full of birds – Wood and Marsh Sandpipers and a few odd eastern race Common Redshanks plus a lone Pied Heron and flocks of Whiskered Terns. Then the heavens opened and we were arriving at our accommodation – a very pleasant surprise out here in the middle of nowhere. Some very neat, clean and well appointed rooms under a pleasant courtyard veranda welcomed us. We took the usual early meal then retired to our beds equally early for a 4.30am departure tomorrow morning.

October 4: Birding In And Around Foli: At 4am there was tea and coffee waiting for us on the veranda as the vehicles revved up and woke up any other unfortunate souls staying here and trying to sleep. We drove about an hour further along the coast in the dark until we reached the general area of Foli. This is the better known birding area, but with vastly inferior accommodation, that a number of bird tour companies still use. Popping down here for the day seemed a better option – especially as the Wallace's Standardwing site is much more accessible without the long hard walk in from Sidangoli. Once here we transferred to a large Toyota Landcruiser 4WD to ferry us up the last mile or so of rough track into the forested hills to get us very close to the lek site of this unique Bird-of-Paradise. The males could be heard making their raucous calls high in the canopy as we arrived. Various glimpsed views were occasionally punctuated with someone being at just the right angle for a good look as this splendid creature fluffed up its various feathers, elongated plumes and finery to attract unseen females. Eventually we all saw the bird well and caught it doing aerial displays, which were especially stunning. By 7.30am we'd left it in peace and were walking along one of the old logging roads along open areas and forest edge where it seems it is much easier to see the sought-after birds than in the depths of the forest itself. Yesterday evening's rain had stopped and left a hot dry and exceedingly humid day, already becoming distinctly uncomfortable by mid-morning. However the birding was good and productive for a while and we were soon notching up many new sightings of birds endemic to Halmahera. Halmahera Oriole posed beautifully for us. This was not an exciting yellow and black bird like so many other orioles, but just dull,

streaky brown, but with the same fluty song. We were torn between looking at scope views of this while another scope was trained on Blue-capped Fruit-Dove – such sweet dilemmas!. At last some of the pesky parrots were performing and not all flying past like squawking bullets. We had gorgeous scope views of vivid Violet-necked Lorries and Red-flanked Lorikeets – brilliant reds, greens, yellows and blues high in the trees. Eclectus Parrots put in further appearances, but inevitably there were various other tantalising “heard only” birds that were much wanted lifers – Goliath Coucal and Dusky Scrubfowl included. There were brief fly-bys of *Accipiters*, both just enough for ID – a very dark-barred young Moluccan Goshawk and a fine adult Variable Goshawk. Golden Bulbuls were seen much better this morning – much flashier than the aptly named Drab Whistler. We notched up yet more Cuckoo-shrikes this morning – both endemics. This whole area seems full of this group and they are all quite similar – difficult to know how or why they are all distinctly different species. The two this morning – Halmahera Cuckoo-shrike and Moluccan Cuckoo-shrike were both easily identified and at one point shared the same tree.

By 10.30am we were all wilting and were ferried back to the main road and taken up a shot track to a small house where we whiled away some time in the heat of the day having an early lunch and a long siesta. This is one of the unavoidable drawbacks of having good accommodation far from the good birding areas in the tropics – it is too far to go back for a break in the middle of the day, and we sat out the heat of the day dreaming of a soft bed in an air-conditioned room to lie down on for a nap! After laying low for 4 hours, admiring the cute twin baby girls of the family in their hammocks, working out how many countries one needs to visit to see all the World's bird families (we came up with a minimum of 18), reading and doing crosswords, we were off again back up the same track into the open forest edge at Foli for the late afternoon session. We were once again transported up in the 4WD, though one of our three drivers decided he could get up the hill too and duly did so. It was still pretty darned hot, but our slow hike down hill did produce a few extra goodies. Further good looks at various parrot species were welcome. We got very close to numerous Ivory-breasted Pittas that seemed to respond to playback, but not enough to show themselves. A lovely pair of Cinnamon-breasted Imperial Pigeons posed for ages at close range and in a distant tree some caught glimpses of another White-streaked Friarbird and a young Metallic Pigeon. On the way down as the light faded we hoped for a roosting movement of the excitingly named Goliath Coucals that we could occasionally hear, but had no luck, though we did flush a Dusky Scrubfowl chick – out of the egg and ready to go! We began our return to Subaim at 6.30pm, arriving by 7.45pm, hot and tired after a very long day, but with plenty of new birds special to Halmahera seen.

October 5: Subaim Back To Sidangoli (The Return To Satan's Crotch): There was a comparatively late start this morning, the alarm clock being superfluous what with the call to prayer belting out at “N” decibels at 5am from the local mosque. We set off after a basic breakfast complete with luggage to bird along the road on the long and bumpy journey back to Sidangoli. Nurlin had various places he knew to try for some of the missing species and did quite well for us. The Goliath Coucals continued to call but elude us. Sombre Kingfisher eventually succumbed to his efforts and we all gained some really good roadside views after several very quick and dashing fly-bys. We also managed to bag the Moluccan Hanging-Parrot – hanging upside down whilst feeding in dense canopy foliage. Another quick roadside halt produced an immature or female Blue Rock Thrush of one of the Asiatic races, looking wonderfully scaly and mottled. Of course it was another hot and sunny day, temperatures and humidity rising to high level by mid-morning, but not to worry as we were travelling and could revert to the comfort of the air-conditioned cars when it all got too much. We pulled in to a local restaurant frequented by the military along the way and had a pleasant lunch, finally arriving back at Sidangoli by about 2pm.

After a break of a couple of hours it was sort of cool enough to venture out again locally to try and whittle away the short list of missing but possible endemics. We returned to the Kali Batu Putih National Park and drove down one of the tracks into the forest and began our wanderings. First off, Nurlin tried calling in Cream-throated Dark-eye with great success. We had lovely looks at several – none of them as depicted in the book,

which omits to put in the pale eye-ring! But White-eyes are surprisingly “easy” on Halmahera as there is only one species. We then got into Pittas! This was another of those tantalising, but all-too-common “pitta experiences” - “so close, yet invisible”. We spent an age calling to at least 3 individuals all making their mournful, haunting, whistling call. We did indeed seem close at times and were all ready for the big event that never happened. We returned at dusk to the main track and began walking back to the vehicles and beyond to the road. It was now almost dark and the Large-tailed Nightjars started calling. These at least were playing ball and we had lovely looks at a bird perched up vertically on a small stump singing away, the white throat patch pulsating with the effort. We later had numerous good fly-overs of these birds when they showed off the quite extensive areas of white in tail and wings. Then it was the turn of the Moluccan Owlet-Nightjar to make a fool of us. It did this easily, calling to us but never showing. It was now gone 7pm. and it had been yet another very long, very hot and tiring day with plenty of good and new birds seen – but definitely time to head for a meal and a cold beer and cold shower.

October 6: Return Birding KBP/ Sidangoli Then To Ternate By Boat And Late Afternoon Birding On Ternate:

Our last chance to find the endemic Owlet-Nightjar and Scops-Owl required another early start, departing after bread and jam at 4.30am. Clive was not 100% so had a lay-in and joined us at a more sociable hour. This was our 4th valiant effort and Nurlin did everything he could to get these two special birds to co-operate. But they wouldn't. We lured both species to within 20 yards or so, but they remained in deep forest edge trees and would not venture out onto more isolated and viewable positions. Highly frustrating, but that was that and dawn came and drew things to a close. We then took the vehicles back down the trail we'd wandered yesterday and continued to try for further elusive, but wanted birds. A stroll down the trail produced catch-up Spectacled Monarch and a convincing mixed flocks of Metallic and Moluccan Starlings – the latter slightly stockier, shorter tailed and clearly with dark eyes. The endemic Moluccan Flycatcher then popped up – a pair in fact, the male and female distinctly different to one another like so many of the Monarchs. This knocked off a couple of the ever-dwindling hit list of likely wanted birds and made us feel a little bit more positive about being out here in the field so early. With very little left on the want list (the Goliath Coucals were serenading us in their bass and baritone booms from thick cover but never showing) it was now time to deal with Ivory-breasted Pitta! We probably spent an hour and a half in two different localities patiently trying to winkle one of these gems from its cover. We called and it called back. We moved and it moved. We tried standing still and waiting; we tried stealth and creeping up on it. We tried to find it in forested slopes and in a lovely shady dried river bed - nothing worked. We gave up, met up with Clive and wandered the track back towards the vehicles a little, trying the while for White-naped Monarch which is present, but was not apparent today. Then we heard another seemingly close Ivory-breasted Pitta, getting closer as local guide Iskander whistled it in. Lets have one last go, being gluttons for punishment and humiliation. We crept down a side track and went through the usual routine of patient playback. This time it really did come in at about head height and the sharp eyes of Nurlin picked it out sitting in the thick of the under-storey. Three of us managed brief looks at this stunning white, turquoise and black beauty before it flipped away and was never seen again. We could have done with another 10 minutes of viewing this lovely bird and it would have been great if everybody had seen it – but such is life, and at least some of us didn't go home totally empty-handed. We tried a little longer for other birds, but by now it was heating up and time to go back to our accommodation, take the second cold shower of the day, pack, have lunch and catch our boat to Ternate.

The return boat journey produced the Red-necked Phalaropes again and on arrival were whisked away to a splendid 4* swish hotel. We had a break of a couple of hours in air-conditioned bliss before heading out at 4pm to do some easy local birding on Ternate. Ternate is little more than a huge smoking volcano rising to over 5,500 feet (1,700m). The perfectly-shaped cone, which last erupted in 1987, is one of a chain of small volcanoes which guard the western approaches to Halmahera and still clearly belching smoke. Ternate was formerly of vital importance as one of the world's few sources of cloves, but today, although that importance has greatly decline, it retains importance as a local administrative centre with only the crumbling remains of

its colonial past as a reminder of its former significance. It is a funny old place, basically a perfectly conical volcano with the many people living around a slightly flatter coastal rim. We nipped out in the customary three vehicles through the traffic for about 40 minutes to arrive at a quite scenic and spectacular crater lake. This was a classic, sheer-sided lake probably a half mile across, wooded all around and the results of a long extinct collapsed volcano now superseded by the one that forms the current island. A few birds were noted. Torresian Crow was the most interesting in that it is a bird from N. Australia and PNG that occurs on a few of the Indonesian islands where other crows do not; how these species distribute themselves (and why) will be a constant mystery to me. A return to the hotel by 6.45pm allowed for a shower and change before we went off for a lovely Chinese meal at a restaurant near the hotel.

October 7: Return To Manado: Today was unavoidably a day of hanging about and travel, but it allowed us to enjoy the cool and luxury of the hotel until late morning until a lunchtime flight to Manado, gaining an hour on the way. The group were returned to the lovely Santika Hotel for the evening. Ken and I were setting off homeward today, so had a joyous 5-6 hour wait in the “Executive Lounge” of the airport (\$5 well spent!) until an evening flight to Jakarta. Mercifully it was +/- on time and got us to Jakarta with plenty of time to connect with our outbound Emirates flight to Dubai.

October 8: Departure Home: Hopefully some of the group managed a little bit of relaxed birding in and around the grounds of the Santika hotel before their departures homewards. Kent and I arrived in Dubai in the early hours and went our separate ways (me to Glasgow and Ken to Birmingham). Alice was flying out on October 9th and hopefully made constructive use of her extra time at the hotel – not a bad place to be “on hold”.

Footnotes: The tour produced many of the hoped-for endemics and I think we all got many life birds (my personal tally was 105). The exact tour itinerary changed many times over from its inception. This was primarily due to airlines continually changing their schedules on a whim and generally mucking us about. Despite this unavoidable hassle we got to all the intended areas some with more time than planned, others with less. Overall I think we saw a very good percentage and representation of the special and endemic birds of the area. There is no way to see it all in one tour – especially in dense, hot, humid SE Asian forests. But we tried hard, did our very best in terms of effort and time in the field and did pretty well in the end. This is not a tour for the faint-hearted! The accommodation was, as warned, “basic” at times (though not as bad as expected and pleasantly interspersed with some lovely posh hotels to break it up). The weather was indeed at times extremely hot and humid – uncomfortable conditions, but again unavoidable. I reckon the rewards and results were worth it.

Especially impressive was the way that Darwin handled logistics. I can't recall a tour in all my years of tour-leading where so much adaptability and flexibility was required and always on hand. As airlines changed schedules Darwin made a few calls, phoned ahead, changed a hotel here and there and “Hey Presto”: problem solved and we continued on an equally good (sometimes better) “plan B” or “C”. As the tour went on and he and Nurlin got to know us and our wishes and abilities, they adapted the tour to suit. The change of hotels and choice of site to visit for Wallace's Standardwing was excellent. Nurlin was a gem in the field and as a traveling companion. His quiet ways in the field steadily got us as many of our target birds as he could muster. The endless early starts and some late finishes were well and truly above and beyond the call of duty: he worked so hard for us at all times. His bird knowledge and local knowledge of where to find species, and the way he and Darwin laid on additional expertise in the form of local guides to make doubly sure we were best provided for in finding the special birds, was greatly appreciated and an essential ingredient to a successful tour. Both Darwin and Nurlin were good fun to travel with – good humoured and full of information about their country.

Indonesia really came alive for me on this tour. As we poured over maps and the field guide and noted all those endemics on all those tiny remote islands, and looked at the huge scale of the country – its remoteness,

vastness and complexity - it made us realise that it would be a life's work to study and see all the birds of the region. I think one of the things that impressed all of us and made the time here so much more pleasant was the friendliness of the local people – smiling, easy-going, courteous – even in the crazy fray of traffic and airports. I think too that we were all surprised/reminded of the large population of Indonesia. While there are many wild places and much lovely forest running for miles up steep hillsides, there are also a lot of people scattered through the more accessible countryside, ironically making it seem a lot more populous and hectic at times than where I live on Islay!

Miscellany

Bananas: During the tour I mentioned, to some disbelief, about people who collect banana stickers. Well take a look at these two sites for example just to let you know what a fascinating world you are missing! <http://www.banana-label.net> & <http://www.beckymartz.com> – there are actually people “out there” (i. Not locked away somewhere safe) trading rare banana stickers for thousands of \$\$\$.

Maleo eggs: Although these are huge in relation to body size they only represent 16% of body weight – the kiwis head that league table with eggs up to 25% of body weight.

Parrot nest sites: There was a question whether all parrots use nest holes. Here is the answer:

“Only the Monk Parakeet and five species of Agapornis lovebird build nests in trees. Three Australian and New Zealand ground parrots nest on the ground. All other parrots and cockatoos nest in cavities, either tree hollows or cavities dug into cliffs, banks or the ground. The use of holes in cliffs is more common in the Americas. Many species will use termite nests”.

Wing-beat noise: I can't find any detailed account of why, or how Blyth's hornbills make such a racket with their wings when they fly. “How” seems to be explained away by “*different structure of the flight feathers*”, while “why” is suggested to be “*for maintaining contact over large distances*”.