

BIRDWATCHING AND WILD ANIMAL VIEWING TOUR IN THE NATIONAL PARKS OF KERINCI SEBLAT AND WAY KAMBAS

A trip report written by Charles Roring

The island of Sumatra is one of the most important bird and wildlife watching destinations in Indonesia. According to Avibase website, there are about 775 species that have been scientifically recorded there. Of that number, there are 31 endemic species and 74 threatened species in the world.

From 18 to 23 February 2023, I had the opportunity to guide 2 European tourists, Karsten and Sheila. They are birdwatchers who live in Germany.

The first location that we went to was Kerinci Seblat National Park that covered around 1.4 million hectare land area. To reach it, I had to fly from Manokwari city to Jakarta - the capital of Indonesia. Because it was already late afternoon, I still had to stay at Hotel Orchardz of Jakarta for 1 night and then flew to Padang - West Sumatra Province the next day. After staying 1 night at the Daima Hotel, I then continued my journey by a minibuss to Kersik Tuo Village in Kayu Aro District, Kerinci Regency, Jambi Province. There, I met Mr. Subandi and stayed at his homestay. The two European tourists arrived a few hours later and stayed at the Bintang Kerinci Hotel. Across the street from where we were staying, a vast expanse of tea and vegetable gardens provided the foreground view for Mount Kerinci that was rising high into the sky. In the morning when we were there, the volcano appeared to be spewing ash, but it seemed that the volcanic activity was only momentary. Therefore, we could still carry out birdwatching activities in the forest at the foot of Mount Kerinci safely.

This tour was organized by Vacation Indonesia Tours (VIT Tours) owned by Darwin Sumang. While in Kerinci, we were assisted by experienced local guides, namely Mr. Subandi and his son Budi. They have for years guided bird-watching visitors who come from all over the world to West Sumatra and Jambi.

The best time for watching birds was in the morning and evening. The birds that we were able to see and identify were the Sumatran Trogon, Scarlet Minivet, Golden Babbler and White-throated Fantail. There were also common birds in the farmlands such as the Cattle Egret, Long-tailed Shrike, Hill Prinia, Black-winged Kite and Barn Swallow. Apart from birds, there were also butterflies and squirrels that we could find while walking along the path of the slopes of Mount Kerinci.

We also did the bird and wildlife observation tour in the afternoon, especially in Rawa Bento. We used a motor boat driven by a local villager. While walking along the small river in the swamp, we managed to see several interesting bird species such as the Common Myna, Purple Heron, Cattle Egret, Gray Wagtail, Barn Swallow, Wood Sandpiper, and others.

Water Buffalo, Banded Langur also called Leaf Monkey (*Presbytis cristata*) are common mammals there.

The next day we continued our journey to the city of Sungaipuh and did bird and wildlife observation along Jalan Tapan. Various types of Sumatran birds can be observed easily while walking along the winding road on the edge of the cliff. We saw Hill Prinia, Black-browed Barbet, Yellow-eared Spiderhunter, Little Spiderhunter, Sumatran Trogon, Fire-tufted Barbet, Sumatran Treepie, Sunda Forktail, Graceful Pitta, Black-headed Bulbul, Black and Crimson Oriole, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, Long-tailed Broadbill, Wreathed Hornbill, and a lot more. Jalan Tapan is a highly recommended birding and wildlife observation location for nature lovers.

We returned to Padang the next day by boarding a Toyota Avanza driven by Oky. Along the way, we made several bird watching stops including on the waterfront for plover, tern and frigatebird. The next morning (22 Feb. 2023), we continued our journey from Padang to Lampung with Batik Air via Jakarta.

Way Kambas National Park is a tourist destination for observing flora and fauna which is well known not only in Indonesia but also in the world. It's a shame, this national park is still closed so tourists can't do activities in it yet. Instead, we carried out animal observation activities only along the edge of the forest while exploring cassava plantations and rubber forests. In the afternoon and evening we were guided by local guides Hariyono and Angga and Moko. During the night birding, we saw the Sunda Scops Owl and the Large-tailed Nightjar. In the morning, the bird watching activities are still guided by Hariyono and Angga. There are many birds that perch on tree branches and twigs such as Blue-throated Bee-eater, Brown-throated Sunbird, Red-throated Barbet, Yellow-vented Bulbul, Ashy Tailorbird, Brown Shrike, Plaintive Cuckoo, Sunda Pygmy Woodpecker, Collared Kingfisher, Javan Munia, and Black-bellied Malkoha, Collared Kingfisher, Sooty-headed Bulbul, Zebra Dove, Spotted Dove, Orange-bellied Flowerpecker, and many more.

After lunch, the next activity is to go along the river using a speedboat guided by Hariyono. He is a well-known birding guide among domestic and foreign bird watchers who visit Way Kambas. The next day (24 Feb 2023), we left for Jakarta.

Personally, this is my first tour to Sumatra. The beauty of nature, the friendliness of the people and the unique culture of Sumatra have left a good impression on me and the tourists who have visited there. Hopefully in the future, the number of tourists vacationing in Kerinci Seblat National Park and Way Kambas National Park can continue to increase, so that they can reopen jobs for local tour guides which had been halted for 2 years, as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic.

PHOTO GALLERY





