

BIRD PHOTOGRAPHY TOUR IN TERNATE AND HALMAHERA WITH SERGIO AND RITA FROM SWEDEN ON 18-23 JULY 2023

by Charles Roring for Vacation Indonesia Tour

Introduction

Ternate and Halmahera are beautiful tropical islands in North Maluku Province of Indonesia. Their rainforest is the habitat of a lot of species of birds including Wallace Standard Wing, Blue-capped Fruit Dove, North Moluccan Pitta, Chattering Lory, White-streaked Friarbird,, and a lot more.



The Trip Report

When Darwin Sumang, the founder and owner of Vacation Indonesia Tours (VIT Tours) contacted me to help guide two photographers from Sweden, I answered, "yes."

I flew from Makassar on 17 July 2023 to Ternate island. Landing on Sultan Babullah airport, I continued my trip to Sidangoli by speedboat taxi.

The next day on 18 July 2023, I returned to the airport of Ternate to meet Sergio and Rita. Adri Boka, a guide from Sulawesi island accompanied them. Our driver Daken helped arrange our transfer by speedboat to Sidangoli town. It took around 25 minutes to cross the strait between Ternate and Halmahera. After checking into Mandiri Inn, I let Sergio and Rita take a rest for around one and a half hours. After that we started our birding photography trip in the afternoon. Our first destination was the beach of Sidangoli to find Beach Kingfisher. We walked along the beach side but we did not see it. There were some Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Willie Wagtail in the nearby trees. We continued our trip by car to a slope at the outskirts of Sidangoli town to look for Blue-capped Fruit Dove. There, we saw the fruit dove as well as some Rufous-bellied Triller in the same trees. I saw Great Cuckoo Dove flying fast above the trees downhill and disappeared into the forest. We crossed the road and walked into the forest where our driver Wan played the sound of Common Paradise Kingfisher. Unfortunately, the bird did not want to come out. I saw some Moluccan Starling among the branches behind me. However it was difficult to shoot them using my camera. Suddenly, we heard the call of Moluccan Flycatcher. Wan played its sound. It came out of the trees and flew to the other side of the road. It landed on the branch of a tree some twenty meters from us. Sergio and Rita took picture of the bird. It was a male bird. He called his female counterpart and sit on the branch of the tree for around 15 minutes. We continued our trip to a higher hill of Sidangoli where we entered an old logging road. There we saw Goliath Coucal, and Rainbow Bee Eater. We stayed there for a few hours to call Moluccan Scops Owl. We saw Large-tailed Nightjar in the area too. It was a great day.



The next morning on 19 July 2023, we started our bird photography trip by looking for Beach Kingfisher. This time, we visited mangrove forest located at the back of people's houses. We saw it sitting on the branch of a tree around 40 meters from us. Later he flew to a tree on the northern side of the main road.



We followed the bird. Sergio and Rita took a lot of pictures of the bird. We continued our trip to look for Sombre Kingfisher and Red-cheeked Parrot. We went to replanted forest of Barito Company.

At the entrance site, we saw the birds and took a lot of pictures of the kingfisher as well as the pictures of Willie Wagtail. Spotted Dove which was an introduced species, could also be seen in the area. We left the replanted forest and entered a nutmeg plantation near a river. There we saw Dusky Scrubfowl. We called Common Paradise Kingfisher several times. He came out and sat on a vine. Later while we took pictures of the bird, we saw White-streaked Friarbird landed on a hanging vine to eat its red flower. He was there quite long. We were able to take a lot of nice photographs of the bird. At lunch time, we returned to Sidangoli and had grilled fish. We continued our trip to the site of Ivory-breasted Pitta. There, our driver some worms for the bird and call it to come using his cell phone and a small portable loudspeaker. Soon after hearing the call the bird came. We had the opportunity to take pictures of the bird.



We continued our trip to a higher hill and walked into the forest again where we saw Halmahera Golden Bulbul and Halmahera Paradise Crow. We continued our trip by car to an open place near a cliff where we saw White Cockatoo, Gurney's Eagle and Blyth's Hornbill in a distant. I tried to take pictures but their quality was not good due to lowlight condition. We returned to Sidangoli to have dinner and took a rest.

Early in the morning on 20 July 2023 at 03:00, we left Sidangoli for Aketajawe Lolobata National Park. We met local guide Mahroji who welcomed us and guided Sergio and Rita into the forest to take pictures of Wallace Standardwing. This bird of paradise is endemic to Halmahera island. We spent our time birding in the island until morning time of 21 July. In this national park, we were able to see and take pictures of other birds as well including North Moluccan Pitta, Common Paradise Kingfisher, Blue and White Kingfisher. We saw Red-flanked Lorikeet and Blyth's Hornbill flying in the air but could not take pictures.







On the morning of 22 July 2023, we checked out of Mahroji's homestay and left the national park by car to Sidangoli's speed boat harbour. We crossed the sea to Ternate city that morning and continued to Hotel Sahid Bela whose front view was beautiful. We did not immediately enter our room. We only left our bags in the hotel and left for the site of Ternate Sahul Pitta in the forest higher than the city. In the first attempt, we were not so successful. We returned to Ternate to have lunch and then did our second attempt to see the bird in other place not too far from the first place. This time we were successful. We saw the bird and took some good photographs. It was a happy moment.

We continued our trip to Lake Toliare to see the beautiful scenery of the lake and Mount Gamalama that was covered by forest, clove and nutmeg plantation. I saw Lesser Frigatebird and Willie Wagtail in her nest. During sunset time, we sat on the beach.

At night, we had grilled fish as our dinner at a restaurant by the sea. The next morning on 23 July 2023, we checked out of our hotel and headed to the airport of Ternate. Rita and Sergio flew to Manado and then back to Sweden. I flew back to West Papua.