



Birdwatching in Labuan Bajo, Flores, Lesser Sunda Islands (Extension)

A Trip Report by Daniel Urslenton Wiser Sumang
Vacation Indonesia Tours (VIT TOURS)

17-23 August 2025

Leif Sixten Lindholm and Lars Ake Cedar arrived at LBJ-Komodo Airport, Labuan Bajo, in the afternoon of August 17th, 2025, at 17:45 Central Indonesia Time (CIT). The name badge of Avifauna Naturresor is a well-prepared effort to be recognized by Leif and Lars at the arrival gate. I wore a name badge as a representative and welcomed them with a warm heart. We immediately drove to the Bintang Flores Hotel for a one-night stay. This tour was professionally organized by Darwin Sumang, the CEO of Vocation Indonesia Tours.



Fig 1. Puarlolo birding site

On Monday, August 18, 2025, we drove straight to Borong Village and made a stop at the Puarlolo birding site for sightseeing, including the Flores Monarch and other endemics such as the Mountain White-eye, Spectacled Monarch, and Dronggo. After a couple of minutes watching birds, we also enjoyed having breakfast boxes and some coffee or tea while listening to the birds singing beautifully. Certainly, Leif and Lars chose tea with less sugar as their main favorite drink.

We continued driving and started discussing various birds. In addition, Lars asked me, “Is there any roadside birding still?” and I said, “Yes.” Furthermore, Samuel recommended the cliff spot of the birding site, which is about 45 minutes from Puarlolo. According to Samuel, there is a good spot for the Flores Leaf Lorikeet, which is not far from Puarlolo. He also said the place has numerous fruit trees; meanwhile, if the location is not guaranteed due to unsupported time, we will

be spotting them in Pagal. Furthermore, we stopped at the spot at 10:32, tried roadside birding before heading to Borong village.



Fig 2. Road site Birding

After fifteen minutes of sightseeing, we went over to Borong Village and began planning the upcoming decisions. Finally, we arrived in Borrong and transferred to the Kharisma Hotel at 15:59. The hotel is quite comfortable and very close to the Kisol, where the location for birding is. Ten minutes later, we headed away to Kisol and prepared for the afternoon and night birding. We made it there at 16:29, which is about 30 minutes from the hotel.



Fig 3. Afternoon and Night Birding in Kisol

Samuel started calling the birds such as White rumped Kingfisher, the Flores Crow, Helmeted Friarbird, etc. Unfortunately, it was almost getting dark for chasing them, and luckily, White rumped Kingfisher responded to the sound all of a sudden. I tried to look at the exact position and pointed it out to Lars and Leif with a good pointer. They really enjoyed spotting White rumped Kingfisher sitting on the branches. Samuel called out to other birds, but the day turned to night.

In the night, we continued walking down the street and followed Samuel while carrying the speaker for the call. Samuel began to play the sounds of Wallace's Scops Owl, Mee's Nightjar, and Moluccan Scops Owl Flores. Wallacea scops owl responded to the call around and over fifty meters, Molluccan appeared with sound at the same time. Furthermore, Samuel and I saw them and tried to show Lars and Leif with good light, which has a flexible switch with zoom in and zoom out. Thank God, we were finally able to see both kinds of owl, Molluccan scops owl flores and Wallaceas scops owl. At about 19:00, after seeing the owls, we went back to the Hotel to have dinner. We were very thankful for the targeted birds on the first day.

On Tuesday, August 19, 2025, we went to Kisol for morning birding at 6:00. We arrived there at 6:33. We had boxes of breakfast first before calling the targeted birds, in some minutes, Samuel tried to play the sound, such as Helmeted Friarbird, Flores Crow, Mountain White-eye, Flores White-eye, Olive-backed Sunbird, Wallace's Heleia/Yellow spectacle white eye, and Ornatte Pitta.



Fig 4. Morning Birding in Kisol

We walked away with the speaker and played various bird sounds, including the targeted lists. We really enjoyed sightseeing at many of them. Lars and Leif were so excited coming with the singing birds along the way. They always got ready with binoculars when the responses of birds flying away and sitting on the wild branches of trees. The birds that always appeared during the call were Helmeted Friarbird, Flores Crow, Mountain White-eye, Flores White-eye, Barred Dove, Black-fronted Flower packer, Black neck-fruit dove, Pacific Swallow, Olive-backed Sunbird, Wallace's Heleia/Yellow spectacle white eye, and many of them that were written on the lists.

When the sun began to heat around 11 to 12, we started waiting for the Flores hawk eagle.

Fifteen minutes later, a bird guide, Samuel, tried to call the Flores hawk eagle. Five minutes later, the powerful bird appeared, coming from the wild jungle, flying away around us approximately 1,600 meters (5,250 feet) above sea level. It flew like a strong and handsome eagle. Lars and Leif were so fascinated when the Flores hawk eagle appeared at the right time.

After enjoying the moment of seeing the super-rare eagle, we decided to leave Kisol for the last day in Borong village. Furthermore, we went to the restaurant first to have lunch, then got ready to check out of the Kharisma Hotel. Additionally, we drove to Ruteng for approximately 1.5 hours and transferred to Sindha Hotel. After completing the administration for check-in, we prepared for the afternoon birding in Ranamese.

In ten minutes, we drove to Ranamese in the afternoon. We arrived there, and we spotted the bonus of the White-rump Kingfisher. Unfortunately, we arrived to find the area covered in thick fog, which made birdwatching a bit difficult. We then went to observe the Tenggara swiftlets, which were abundant in an old abandoned house left by former residents. There, Lars and Leif were very satisfied to observe how the birds interacted with one another, as their nesting areas were very close and perfect for photography. Leif took several shots with his long-lens camera.

After observing the Tenggara swiftlets, we moved to another location while playing bird calls.



Fig 5. Birding in Ranamese with Thick Fog

About three minutes after we arrived, other birds suddenly appeared, like a Golden-bellied gerygone. Fifteen minutes by calling birds, we were interested in having a coffee break. Sitting on the bench and talking to each other, we were surprised by the Collared kingfisher singing on the branch of a big tree. Lars and Leif were so rushed in looking at a bird named the Collared Kingfisher. We really enjoyed drinking coffee and seeing the kingfisher. At the end, we decided to go back to the Sindha hotel and be ready for dinner.

On Wednesday, August 20, 2025, we drove to Pagal early in the morning at 6:30 after having breakfast in the restaurant of the hotel. The first bird we saw was a black backed fruit dove, sitting on a branch and enjoying the morning atmosphere, from a distance of approximately 100 meters. A black-backed fruit dove features a white head, dark blackish back, and bright yellow underparts. It typically perches quietly on branches, displaying its striking color contrast and compact, elegant body shape. Then we continued by playing various bird call recordings such as the Flores green pigeon, golden-rumped flowerpecker, crested heleia, Flores heleia, lemon-bellied white-eye, ornate pitta, Tenggara paradise flycatcher, Tenggara whistler, Flores minivet, yellow-spectacled white-eye, black-naped fruit dove, and brown sunbird. We witnessed an incredible sight as all the birds we called through the speaker appeared one by one in a truly spectacular manner.

Lars and Leif really enjoy the moment.



Fig 6. Morning Birding Pagal

We moved on to another spot, walking along the main road on Mount Pagal for about fifty meters. Samuel played the call of the Flores leaf lorikeet to attract them. After five minutes of calling with no response, we continued walking along the road guided by Samuel. As we were walking, suddenly a pair of Flores leaf lorikeets—a male and a female—flew past. They moved extremely fast and called loudly, making it difficult for Lars and Leif to see them clearly. Because of that, we decided to take a short break and return to the hotel for lunch and some rest.



Fig 7. Pagal Roadside Birding

At 3:00 p.m., we hurried back and prepared our equipment to observe birds in the late afternoon and evening. Our first destination was Golousang, where we saw several species such as the jungle flycatcher, pygmy cupwing, fantail, mountain white-eye, and others. After almost half an hour observing birds at the first spot, we moved to another location, which took about fifteen minutes to reach by car. When we arrived, Samuel began to play the calls of other birds, including the bare-throated whistler and the ornate pitta, which was particularly difficult to spot at that time. About three minutes later, after playing the bird calls, we suddenly heard a response from an ornate pitta. However, since it was already getting dark and the bird did not appear, we decided to take a short break for coffee.



Fig 8. Gololusang Afternoon Birding

At 6:00 p.m., we prepared for night birding after our coffee break. The Flores scops owl was our main target to observe, as it had been extremely difficult to see when we previously tried

calling it in Kisol. The Flores scops owl is a very elusive, wild, and protected species found in the forests of Flores, East Nusa Tenggara. Because of this, even after repeatedly playing its call through the audio, the owl never appeared. Therefore, at around 7:00 p.m., we decided to return to the hotel and enjoy dinner together.

On Thursday, August 21, 2025, we continued our trip for morning birding in Golousang. When we arrived at the top of the mountain, surrounded by stunning scenery, we began exploring the next birding spots in the area. Samuel started playing various bird calls for species that inhabit the mountain forest of Golousang. At that moment, we were truly amazed—especially Lars and Leif, who were delighted by the birds they saw, such as the scaly-crowned honeyeater, barethroated whistler, leaf warbler, mountain white-eye, Flores white-eye, Sunda warbler, mountain tailorbird, and honeyeaters. During this session, Lars and Leif fully enjoyed the birdwatching experience, and Leif took the perfect opportunity to photograph the many species that appeared.



Fig 8. Golousang Morning Birding

At 12:00 p.m., we decided to continue our birdwatching in the late afternoon and evening after having lunch. At 2:00 p.m., we prepared to head back to Golousang for the afternoon and night observation. We arrived at another spot to try calling the Ornate Pitta, a bird that is extremely difficult to see clearly. After that, we moved to another location near the Flores scops owl spot for the night session.

At 17:30, Samuel began playing the call of the Flores scops owl, but only its response could be heard—it never came close enough to be seen. We became quite frustrated that evening, as we had tried various methods to spot the Flores scops owl, a species that is truly elusive and extremely



hard to observe. Eventually, Samuel and I entered the forest, staying still and watching carefully, hoping to catch even a shadow or any sign of the bird.

At 17:30, we decided to return to the hotel. During the drive, I asked Samuel whether any other Flores owls could be seen more easily and observed well. Samuel said there was an owl spot in Labuan Bajo, about five minutes from the hotel. I then informed Leif and Lars about the owl spot in Labuan Bajo. They listened attentively, and we agreed to visit the location after checking in at the Bintang Flores Hotel in Labuan Bajo.

On Thursday, August 22, 2025, at 6:00, we continued our birdwatching in Ranamese. During this session, we observed various Flores specialty birds and other endemic species, such as flowerpeckers, drongos, red-cheeked parrots, ruddy cuckoo-doves, russet-capped tesias, paradise flycatchers, Wallacean cuckooshrikes, Flores minivets, Flores jungle flycatchers, ashy-bellied white-eyes, flame-breasted sunbirds, and rufous-chested flycatchers. After observing various unique bird species, we walked along Lake Ranamese, watching the waterbirds swimming and enjoying the beauty of the bright morning.

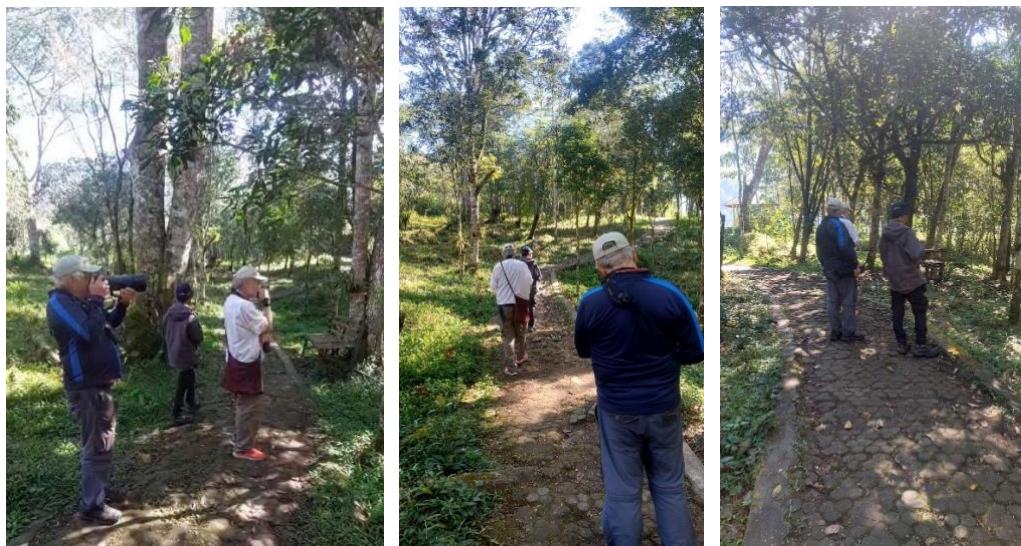


Fig 9. Morning Birding in Ranamese

At 11:30, we prepared ourselves and returned to the hotel for lunch and a short rest. After that, we planned to continue birding in Golousang at 15:00. It had been an incredibly beautiful day, just like our first day, and we truly felt it throughout the journey. After having lunch and taking a brief rest, we got ready to head to Golousang and walked along the road lined with habitats of Flores' endemic birds. There, we observed the Flores Jungle Flycatcher, Flores Shortwing, Starlings, and many others. As the day grew darker, at around 18:00, we returned to the hotel for our last dinner in Ruteng. It was such an extraordinary experience to witness the endemic birds in

this region. Tomorrow, we will continue our journey to Labuan Bajo, the final destination of our trip.



Fig 10. Afternoon Birding in Gololusang

On Friday, August 23, 2025, at 6:00 a.m., I handled the check-out process at the Sindha Hotel. After completing the hotel administration, we quickly headed to the car, and Melky, our driver, helped carry the luggage while I assisted by arranging the items neatly. We departed, driving through the beautiful and pristine mountain landscape. It was truly amazing to be presented with such breathtaking scenery, from mountain forests and rice fields to plantations. We enjoyed the journey all the way to our final destination. We made a short stop in Mamis to look for the Rufous Kingfisher, and thankfully, we were able to see it. After this brief roadside birding stop, we continued driving straight to Labuan Bajo.



Fig 11. Birding in Mamis

We arrived in Labuan Bajo at 13:02 in the afternoon. We stopped for a moment to have lunch at a restaurant. The weather was very clear that day, and we enjoyed our lunch together. After lunch, we headed to the Bintang Flores Hotel. Before arriving, I called the Front Office or Receptionist to confirm whether Lars and Leif's rooms were ready. After receiving confirmation by phone, I informed both of them that their room reservations were ready, and they were happy to hear that and thanked us for the preparation.

At 14:19, we arrived at the Bintang Flores Hotel, and I immediately went to the receptionist to handle the administrative process, including presenting the required documents such as passports or IDs. Once everything was completed, all of Lars and Leif's luggage was delivered to their respective rooms. We then took a short rest before continuing our birdwatching trip at a spot near Labuan Bajo.

At 16:00, we prepared our gear and headed to the next birding spot. The location was only five minutes from the hotel. When we arrived, we observed various bird species such as the Mountain White-eye, Sunbirds, and others. We also saw several waterbirds, as there were wide rice fields along the roadside.

After enjoying the moment of watching these different birds, we moved to another spot, just a three-minute drive from the previous location. When we arrived, we again encountered a variety of bird species. Samuel began calling for the Ornate Pitta, and we were fortunate to see it. It was an incredible birding experience that afternoon in Labuan Bajo.



Fig 12. Roadside Birding Spot (Labuan Bajo)

At 17:30, we prepared for night birding at a spot known for Flores' iconic owls, such as the Mee's Nightjar and the Moluccan Scops Owl (Flores). When we arrived at the location, Samuel began playing the call of the Mee's Nightjar. Five minutes later, the Mee's Nightjar responded, and it was truly incredible, we were able to observe it clearly. One of the distinctive traits of this nocturnal bird is the bright reflection of its eyes at night. Lars and Leif really enjoyed watching the Mee's Nightjar as it appeared, flying and perching on tree branches. Leif did not waste the opportunity; he immediately took out his long camera lens and captured stunningly clear photos. I believe this is a moment they will never forget because it was truly memorable.

After observing the Mee's Nightjar, Samuel called for the Moluccan Scops Owl (Flores). Three minutes later, a shadow flew by, and I initially thought it was an ordinary bird. Then I informed Samuel that there was movement in the tree right above where we were standing. Samuel continued playing the call without stopping, and one minute later, the Moluccan Scops Owl (Flores) responded. Samuel pointed his flashlight upward, and amazingly, the owl was perched right above us. Lars and Leif were thrilled, enjoying and capturing the sight of the owl with great excitement.

Thank God we had witnessed many endemic birds in Flores, especially in Labuan Bajo, and it even exceeded the target list we had prepared for Lars and Leif. We were truly happy and grateful for all these extraordinary moments. We then headed to a restaurant in Labuan Bajo that offered a beautiful view of the sea. With grateful hearts, we ordered grilled fish as a way to celebrate the wonderful birdwatching journey we had experienced in Labuan Bajo. The five of us—Lars, Leif, Samuel, Melky, and I—shared this unforgettable moment, as it was our final dinner in Labuan



Bajo. This will always remain an extraordinary memory from our birdwatching adventure in Flores, Labuan Bajo.

On Saturday, August 24, 2025, it was our last day in Labuan Bajo. I handled the check-out process and made sure no items were left behind. Melky drove us to Komodo Airport (LBJ), as each of us—Lars, Leif, and I—had different flight schedules. Lars and Leif were flying to Jakarta for their first transit before returning to their home country, Sweden. I was flying to Makassar for transit before finally landing at Mutiara Sis Al-Jufri Airport in Palu, Central Sulawesi.

We headed to the airport with a slightly heavy heart, hoping that God would allow us to meet again in the future. We arrived at the airport about ten minutes after leaving the Bintang Flores Hotel, unloaded our luggage, and said our goodbyes. We expressed our gratitude to our driver, Melky—whom we fondly called Om Melky. Goodbye, and farewell, Labuan Bajo.