

Birding Snippets

Singapore • Malaysia • Indonesia • Thailand © Southeast Asia ©

No. 1 • 2006

Casual Montane Birding at Mount Kinabalu (Family Holiday)

Indigo Flycatcher *Eumyias indigo* @ Mt. Kinabalu, Sabah

© TanGC 2006

Arriving in Kota Kinabalu International Airport at around 8pm, I met my driver, stopped for some groceries at a convenience store and got on the road to Mount Kinabalu National Park. As the road climbed, patches of fog were encountered, greatly reducing visibility.

We arrived at the Park Headquarters at about 10.30pm, checked into 1 of the 8 units of Nepenthes Lodges and settled in for the night. At an altitude of 1500 metres, the night air was wonderfully crisp and cool.

Birding in the mornings were simple affairs of stepping out of the front door or looking out of the balcony at the back. The lodge is built on a slope, so the balcony is at canopy level! I purposely sat facing the windows while having

breakfast, and sure enough birds could be seen moving about right outside. A small flock of **Sunda Laughingthrushes** was seen in this manner. The **Chestnut-capped Laughingthrushes** looked rather different compared to the birds in Peninsular Malaysia as they are a subspecies – with the chestnut cap extending below the eyes.

Sunda Laughingthrush *Garullax palliatus*

© TanGC 2006

Chestnut-capped Laughingthrush *Garrulax mitratus damnatus* © TanGC 2006

Other birds seen around the lodge in the mornings included a confiding **Indigo Flycatcher** which came within 2.7m of me, allowing a full frame shot with my 400mm lens! The **Bornean Whistler** (endemic) was inquisitive – coming close to check me out! Even the **Bornean Treepies** (endemic) seemed to give me a look over!

Bornean Whistler *Pachycephala hypoxantha* © TanGC 2006

A **Grey Wagtail** was seen walking on the roof of the Rajah Lodge located next to the Nepenthes Lodges, while an **Ashy Drongo** was seen on the balcony of the Rajah Lodge.

Glossy Swiftlets nested under the eaves of the Nepenthes Lodges, but were wary of people and flew away whenever anyone entered or left the Lodges. A **Short-tailed Magpie** foraged among the trees next to the Lodge. Large flocks of **Chestnut-crested Yuhinas** (endemic) foraged among the canopies. A **Yellow-breasted Warbler** and a female **Little Pied Flycatcher** were also observed.

A shy **Sunda Whistling-Thrush** was seen perching on the low fence along

the road a short distance away. In the later part of the afternoon, while enjoying a warm cup of Milo in the lodge, the Sunda Whistling-Thrush could also be seen outside the windows! It would be moving about the ground, taking off whenever it feels disturbed.

Short-tailed Magpie *Cissa thalassina* © TanGC 2006

A male **Grey-chinned Minivet** flew above the Mountain Garden in a bright flash of red. An **Ochraceous Bulbul** fed on the small red fruits of a tree nearby.

At the Park Office, an unidentified sparrowhawk-sized raptor with barred underparts soared overhead.

Chestnut-crested Yuhina *Yuhina everetti* © TanGC 2006

One afternoon I took a walk on the paved road from the Lodge to Timponon Gate – the start point of the climb to the peak of Mount Kinabalu. This walk is about 3.5 kilometers one way and would take me from an altitude of 1500m to 1800m. It was an uphill walk but the cool air made it comfortable. A small group of people on a guided tour encountered a green snake with red eyes - looked like a Bamboo Pit Viper to me. Deviating from

the road to a trail, a **Sunda Bush Warbler** was seen at close range singing. Its song was so weak that I thought at first that it must be far away! A Yellow-breasted Warbler was seen bringing nest material to a cup-shaped nest built into the soil bank beside the road, however it was very well camouflaged. A **Grey-throated Babbler** skulked among the bushes. On the way down, a brown-coloured snake lay dead on the roadside, I was quite sure it wasn't seen on my way up.

Yellow-breasted Warbler *Seicercus montis*

© TanGC 2006

On the last morning, a small brown bird was encountered on the car porch at Rajah Lodge, it was rather shy and flew away, towards the forest, landing on the ground. It was rather dark but I managed to get a photo by using manual focus, before it flew into the forest. With the photo, I was able to identify it as a **White-browed Shortwing** – a good end to my casual birding at Mt Kinabalu.

White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana*

© TanGC 2006

The driver pick me up at 10am and since my flight was at night, I spent the rest of the afternoon at KK, visiting a few shopping centres and found Wisma Merdeka *the* shopping centre for books on birds and other aspects of nature. Here, I found an excellent book on the birds of Mount Kinabalu entitled *A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Mt. Kinabalu, Borneo*. See my book review.

Practicalities

Flights to Kota Kinabalu

AirAsia – from Senai, Johor. Only evening flights. I had chicken rice at the terminal for dinner and it was delicious!

AirAsia – from KLIA. Multiple flights everyday.

SilkAir/MAS – from Changi Airport. Not everyday.

Accommodation

Ranges from Hostels to 4 bedroom Units. I took the 2 bedroom Nepenthes Lodge (the northern most). For bird watching, I think units at either end are probably better than those in the middle. Must be booked from www.suterasanctuarylodges.com.my

I booked by calling the KK office:

Sutera Sanctuary Lodges

Sales & Reservation Office:

Lot G15, Ground Floor, Wisma Sabah

88000, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

Tel : (60-88) 243629 **Fax:** (60-88) 259552

Transport to Mt. Kinabalu National Park

If not renting a vehicle, transport from the airport to Mount Kinabalu and back can be arranged through Sutera Sanctuary Lodges Office as well. The difference is that payment is made to the driver directly.

Book Review by a Layman

A Photographic Guide to the Birds of Mt. Kinabalu, Borneo

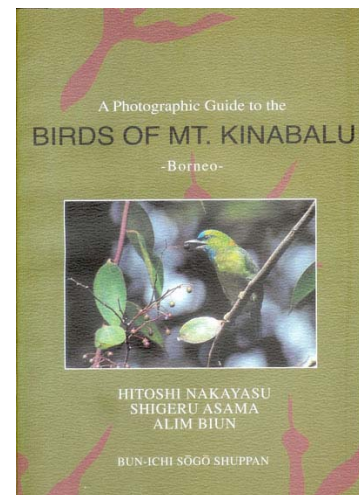
Authors: Hitoshi Nakayasu, Shigeru Asama & Alim Biun

Translated by Kevin Short

Publisher: Bun-Ichi Sōgō Shuppan Co., Ltd, 1996

ISBN: 4-8299-3048-9

Dimensions: Height 21cm, Width 15cm, Depth 1cm,
152 pages



This book is a wonderful introduction to the avifauna of Mt Kinabalu. It is conveniently divided into 3 main chapters covering Poring (lowlands), Park Headquarters (montane) & Panar Laban (sub-alpine).

Around 300 species have been recorded from Mt. Kinabalu. This book features **132 species** in colour photos, as they are seen in the Park. The birds chosen are those which can be commonly encountered.

The birds are described as they are seen at Mt. Kinabalu. This really helps in the identification of the birds. Useful details include time of day the species is likely to be encountered, whether it joins in bird waves, whether it prefers to keep to the canopies, whether it is commonly seen around streetlamps or is shy and secretive, where it is likely to be seen - down to specific locations eg. the veranda of the New Fellowship Hostel, etc. Using the photos and information described, it is possible to identify almost all the birds likely to be seen in a 2 or 3 day visit to the Park.

Malay names and names in the local Dusun language are listed.

The birds described in the book are conveniently listed in a table showing their frequency of occurrence at all 3 locations.

The 29 species endemic to Mt. Kinabalu are listed at the back of the book, though not all are described.

At RM 29.95, this book represents an incredible value. It comes with protective plastic sleeve, is light and easily carried in the field compared to the heavy hardcover *Birds of Borneo* by B. E. Smythies which is more like a reference book to be kept at home or in the lodge. The little Smythies companion book is even lighter and more handy, but it also lists birds not found at Mt. Kinabalu and thus may be confusing for amateurs.

The only other book covering the birds of Mt Kinabalu specifically is the *Birds of Mount Kinabalu* by G.W.H. Davison which has nice drawings of 62 species but is bigger and comes in hardcopy, so is not suitable to use in the field.

Availability

As far as I am aware, this book is only available at Iwase Bookshop on the ground floor of Wisma Merdeka in Kota Kinabalu city.

Among the shopping centres in Kota Kinabalu, **Wisma Merdeka** is *the* place to go for nature books on Borneo. There are a number of bookshops, including one stocking the whole range of nature books published by Natural History Publications (Borneo) Sdn. Bhd.