

The Nature of Sulawesi

1 – 19 March, 2014

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Dates: 1 – 19 March 2014

Maximum group: 10 people

Fitness level: moderately strenuous

Trip cost: USD \$2900 (twin-share)

This 18-day journey will take us to some of the most remarkable and biologically rich habitats across the enigmatic island of Sulawesi.

In terms of biodiversity, Sulawesi (formerly known as Celebes) is perhaps the most unique island of the Indonesian archipelago. Nestled between two distinct biological regions, this large mountainous island belongs to neither and stands on its own with a higher number of endemic species than anywhere else in Southeast Asia. More than half of its mammals, such as the famous Babirusa and

Anoa, are restricted to the island, and an incredible 88 species of birds occur nowhere else in the world. Much of the flora of Sulawesi is also particular to the island, however it remains poorly known and new

species continue to be discovered on a regular basis. Eleven species of Pitcher Plants (*Nepenthes*) are found on the island, including some of the most spectacular and unusual forms.

This guided trip has been specifically tailored to provide unparalleled opportunities for viewing Sulawesi's amazing flora and fauna. Birdwatchers, nature photographers, and pitcher plant enthusiasts alike will enjoy sightings of a diversity of species in their natural habitat. The tour will be led by naturalist and wildlife photographer **Ch'ien Lee**, who has explored nearly every corner of the island over the past two decades.



Top left: Purple-bearded Bee-eater (*Meropogon forsteni*), top right: *Nepenthes pitopangii*, bottom: mossy forest in Lore Lindu National Park.

ITINERARY

Day 0: Saturday, 1 March 2014

Arrival and Orientation

We will convene at Hotel Pantai Gapura in Makassar where we will enjoy a sumptuous Indonesian dinner and an orientation to the tour.

Day 1: Sunday, 2 March 2014

Tana Toraja Highlands

We depart Makassar after breakfast for the 8-hour drive into the Tana Toraja Highlands. The “Land of Heavenly Kings” is a region of incredible natural beauty, with immaculate rice terraces nestled between towering mountains. The unique traditional Torajan houses are intricately ornamented and shaped like boats with steeply upward sloping roofs. We will stay in traditional “tongkonan” houses in the highland village of Batutumonga with a sweeping view over Tana Toraja.



Top: traditional Torajan houses, bottom left: *Nepenthes tomoriana*, bottom right: upper slopes of Gunung Sesean.

Day 2: Monday, 3 March 2014

Mount Sesean

Behind the village of Batutumonga rises the impressive Gunung Sesean (2100 m). Although the mountain has suffered large forest fires in the past decade there are still a few areas which host pristine vegetation. Our morning hike will take us to dwarf mossy forest to observe pitcher plants (*N. maxima* and *N. nigra*) as well as numerous orchids such as the rare and beautiful *Paphiopedilum sangii*. The mountain is also home to some of Sulawesi’s endemic montane birds including the Fiery-browed Myna (*Enodes erythrophris*). After lunch we will visit several cultural sites around the Torajan highlands to observe traditional woodcarvings and the “tau tau” limestone cliff graves.

Day 3: Tuesday, 4 March 2014

Bone Bay

We will depart Toraja early in the morning and head eastwards, descending to the warm tropical coastline of Bone Bay. Along this road we will stop to visit numerous sites for unusual plants, including several *Nepenthes*: *N. maxima*, *N. mirabilis* (giant form), and the endemics *N. glabrata* and *N. tomoriana* (an ultramafic specialist). By evening we will arrive at our destination in Wotu.

Day 4: Wednesday, 5 March 2014

Road to Tentena

Our day will be spent driving further north around Lake Poso, Indonesia’s third deepest lake and home to numerous eels and endemic fish. Several other populations of *Nepenthes* will be visited along this route, including dwarf forms of *N. maxima*. By afternoon we will reach the lakeside town of Tentena.



Top left: *Nepenthes eymae*, top right: *N. hamata*, bottom: Red-knobbed Hornbill (*Aceros cassidix*).

Day 5: Thursday, 6 March 2014

Pompangeo Mountains

Heading north and east from Tentena, we will transfer to 4wd vehicles before driving high up into the Pompangeo range. The mountain road will afford good visibility into the canopy of the rich forest and we will be on the lookout for endemic birds including Golden-mantled Racket-tail (*Prioniturus platurus*), Purple-winged Roller (*Coracias temminckii*), and the Sulawesi Hawk-Eagle (*Nisaetus lanceolatus*). With luck we may even sight the strange and diurnal Bear Cuscus (*Ailurops ursinus*). Higher up the road we will stop to examine the montane vegetation which is rich with orchids and pitcher plants. Perhaps the most spectacular form of *Nepenthes maxima* occurs at this locality, with large striped pitchers and purple ruffled leaves. The endemic *N. glabrata* also grows in abundance and thickets are often beautifully adorned with their characteristic white upper pitchers. A nice form of *N. nigra* also grows here. Afterwards we will head east along the spectacular and rugged Ampana coastline where huge ultramafic mountains dip steeply into the crystal clear waters of Tomini Bay. Depending on available time we may stop in a secluded beach for an afternoon of snorkeling before reaching the coastal town of Ampana

Day 6-9: Friday-Monday, 7-10 March 2014

Gunung Lumut

From Ampana we head eastwards and then hired motorbike drivers will carry us into the interior to the foot of Gunung Lumut where we will proceed on foot (c. 4 hours) to a riverside campsite in the mountains. Three days will be spent exploring the forested slopes of "Moss Mountain". The jungle here hosts probably the richest floristic diversity in Sulawesi, and in addition to wild gingers, palms, and orchids we will encounter four species of *Nepenthes* including *N. eymae* and the striking *N. hamata* with its incredible clawed peristome. The endemic Red-knobbed Hornbill (*Aceros cassidix*) is encountered in large numbers here, its loud wingbeats frequently heard above the canopy. The higher elevations of this range are also host to the mysterious Mountain Anoa (*Bubalus quarlesi*), an endemic species of dwarf buffalo with a legendary reputation for its aggressive behavior. We will return to Ampana by Monday evening.

Day 10: Tuesday, 11 March 2014

Ampana

We will enjoy a rest day in our seaside cottages in Ampana.

Day 11: Wednesday, 12 March 2014

Napu Valley

We will depart Ampana after breakfast and proceed west to Poso and then into the mountains. This scenic drive will take us through montane forest and open grassy savannah where we can view numerous pitcher plants including an unusual dwarf form of *N. maxima* and also carnivorous sundews (*Drosera*). By early evening we will reach the small town of Wuasa where we will overnight in a lodge.

Day 12: Thursday, 13 March 2014

Lore Lindu National Park

Our day will be spent on an easy hike through the montane mossy forest of Lore Lindu National Park. Here we can observe the very rare pitcher plant *Nepenthes pitopangii*, as well as several other species. The trail also offers excellent chances of viewing many of Sulawesi's endemic birds including the Malia (*Malia grata*), Caerulean Cuckoo-shrike (*Coracina temminckii*) and the spectacular Purple-bearded Bee-eater (*Meropogon forsteni*). In the afternoon we will drive to the city of Palu on the western coast.

Days 13-15: Friday-Sunday, 14-16 March 2014

Nantu Wildlife Reserve

Two early morning flights will take us from Palu to Makassar and then to our destination at Gorontalo. Located on the south shore of the Minahasa Peninsula, this city is bordered by crystal clear waters and coral reefs. After receiving our permits from the Forest Department we will head inland to Abudu Nantu Wildlife Reserve. Opened only recently to visitors, this lowland forest reserve is home to abundant birds and animals, and affords the best chance of viewing the enigmatic Babirusa (*Babirusa celebensis*), Sulawesi's most famous endemic mammal. Every day the Babirusa emerge from the forest to ingest mineral rich mud at a salt spring located not far from our camp. Although these animals are exceedingly shy, we will be able to observe them at close range by concealing ourselves within an observation hide. The forest is also rich with birds and we may catch glimpses of the seldom-seen Sulawesi Tarictic Hornbill (*Penelopides exarhatus*), the beautiful Red-bellied Pitta (*Pitta erythrogaster*) and numerous species of fruit doves. On Day 15 we will return to Gorontalo.



Top: Babirusa (*Babirusa celebensis*), bottom left: Spectral Tarsier (*Tarsius tarsier*), bottom right: Lilac-cheeked Kingfisher (*Cittura cyanotis*).

Day 16: Monday, 17 March 2014

Tangkoko Nature Reserve

An early morning flight will take us to the city of Manado located near the northern tip of the Minahasa Peninsula. This corner of the island is dominated by a number of large volcanoes, some of which are still highly active and venting sulfurous fumes. While our luggage is transferred to our lodge, we will proceed directly to Tangkoko Batu Angus Nature Reserve, Sulawesi's most famous park. A morning hike will take us through the lowland rainforest, offering excellent opportunities for observing many endemic species of wildlife such as the Sulawesi Crested Macaque (*Macaca nigra*), Bear Cuscus, and a host of birds including several types of forest kingfishers. The wildlife here is habituated to the presence of people and it is not unusual to be able to approach animals and birds at a very close distance. At dusk we will witness Spectral Tarsiers (*Tarsius tarsier*) emerging from their tree holes for their nightly foraging. One of the world's smallest primates, these tarsiers dwell in small family groups and feed almost exclusively on nocturnal insects. By evening we will transfer to our private lodge on the nearby island of Lembeh.

Day 17: Tuesday, 18 March 2014

Lembeh Island

Following breakfast we will head out to Lembeh's coral reefs for an opportunity to snorkel at this world-class diving destination. An incredible diversity of marine life can be observed here including pygmy seahorses, frogfish, a great variety of nudibranchs, and the amazing Mimic Octopus (*Thaumoctopus mimicus*).



Day 18: Wednesday, 19 March 2014

End of Tour

The tour finishes following breakfast. Participants may wish to extend their stay in Lembeh, which offers scuba diving packages and other outdoor activities in the region. Transfer back to Manado airport is included. Participants staying for the optional 5-day tour extension to the Moluccan island of Halmahera (see below) will enjoy a rest day on Lembeh island.



Top left: *Nepenthes maxima*, top right: *N. nigra*, bottom left: Bear Cuscus (*Ailurops ursinus*), bottom right: *N. glabrata*.

REGISTRATION

To register for the trip please send an email to: mail@wildborneo.com.my. Space is limited to 10 persons.

All registered participants will receive a trip dossier including: detailed itinerary, suggested packing list, and information on health, flights, porters, and other travel practicalities.

Cost for the trip is **USD \$2900** per participant, assuming twin-share accommodation. Please inquire about single occupancy rooms. A non-refundable deposit of **USD \$250** is required to secure registration, and full payment must be made by 15 January 2014.

These fees are inclusive of all internal transportation, airfares, lodging, guide fees, park fees, and all meals (excluding lunches on days 4, 5, 10-13, dinners on days 12, 15, and additional beverages).

Tour participants are required to arrange for their own airfare to Makassar, South Sulawesi, and onwards from Manado, North Sulawesi. Multiple daily flights are available for Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta.

OPTIONAL EXTENSION: HALMAHERA

Situated midway between Sulawesi and New Guinea in the tropical marine waters of the Coral Triangle, lies the curious and enigmatic island Halmahera. Although having a similar geology to larger neighbor Sulawesi, being composed of four sinuous peninsulas each with their own distinctive volcanic, karst, and ultramafic rocks, Halmahera is astonishing in terms of its biological uniqueness. At about 18,000 sq km, it is the largest island of the Moluccas (or 'Spice Islands'), and its rugged and remote interior is still extensively covered with rainforest.

The 19th Century naturalist Alfred Russel Wallace, who spent the better part of a decade traversing the Indonesian archipelago, visited Halmahera (then more commonly referred to as 'Gilolo') in 1857-1858 and recognized the island as a complete unknown in terms of its flora and fauna. Whilst basing himself on the nearby volcanic island of Ternate, Wallace made numerous forays onto the mainland and other offshore islands to collect specimens of insects and birds, many of which he noted were completely new to science. One such find was a remarkable new bird of paradise which Wallace considered one of his greatest discoveries and later came to bear his name. It was also here on Halmahera in 1858, that Wallace formulated his own theory of natural selection, independently from Charles Darwin, whilst suffering from a feverish delirium brought on by malaria.

Although not as biodiverse as the Sunda islands or New Guinea, in part due to its smaller size and distance from the mainlands of Southeast Asia and Australia, Halmahera (inclusive of several of its near offshore islands such as Morotai and Bacan) is a veritable hotspot for species endemism. Some notable animal specialties include the Ornate Cuscus (*Phalanger ornatus*), Sailfin Lizard (*Hydrosaurus weberi*), and Tri-colored Monitor (*Varanus yuwonoi*), among many others. But it is the wonderful array of endemic birds for which the island is particularly known, and visiting naturalists often seek out such beauties as the Ivory-breasted Pitta (*Pitta maxima*), White Cockatoo (*Cacatua alba*), Invisible Rail (*Harbrophtila wallacii*), and the remarkable Wallace's Standardwing (*Semioptera wallacii*).

Day 1: Wednesday, 19 March 2014

Participants will enjoy a rest day at our resort cottages on Lembeh island. Optional snorkeling, diving, and sea kayaking packages are available.



Top left: *Nepenthes danseri*, top right: Purple Dollarbird (*Eurystomus azureus*), bottom left: treefrog (*Litoria* sp.), bottom right: Ornate Cuscus (*Phalanger ornatus*).

Day 2: Thursday, 20 March 2014

We will depart in the morning to Manado airport, fly to the tiny volcanic island of Ternate, and then proceed to the mainland by boat and then board private vehicles for a 4-hour drive to Weda Resort on the east coast. After our arrival we will enjoy some short walks around the resort where there is excellent bird watching including abundant hornbills, parrots, and kingfishers. A night hike in the area will reveal various species of frogs, insects, and if we are lucky an Ornate Cuscus.

Day 3: Friday, 21 March 2014

Depart the resort pre-dawn and proceed to the Wallace's Standardwing lek site. Like other Birds-of-paradise, the males arrive just before dawn and put on a raucous display, particularly if any female birds show up. We'll spend several hours at this site as there are also many other birds to see including the beautiful but shy Ivory-breasted Pitta. Afterwards we will hike through along a stream and small waterfall for a picnic lunch, exploring the forest. We will return to the resort mid-afternoon.

Day 4: Saturday, 22 March 2014

Following breakfast we will drive north along the east coast to the ultramafic soil outcrops to observe the pitcher plant *Nepenthes danseri* and other unusual plants along the slopes and mangroves. We will return to the resort for lunch. In the afternoon we will enjoy snorkeling in the nearby coral reefs, immediately offshore from the resort.

Day 5: Sunday, 23 March 2014

Our morning will be spent hiking along some older logging tracks observing wildlife and birds, including a chance to see the endemic Purple Dollarbird, Paradise Crow, and White Cockatoo. After lunch participants will have the option for rest or additional snorkeling or scuba diving packages (not included).

Day 6: Monday, 24 March 2014

Morning departure to Ternate and return flight to Manado.

Halmahera Extension trip cost: **USD \$950** per person, all inclusive.

