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Sarawak, Borneo

18th – 23rd May 2017

Leader: Yeo Siew Teck

Participant: Joe Thompson



Dulit Frogmouth

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This was an intended clean-up trip to Sarawak, the lesser known-half of East Malaysia, as Joe had done well on a previous visit to Sabah. It was an interesting tour as we country-ticked Brunei too, in a failed attempt to twitch the undescribed 'Spectacled Flowerpecker' that had been seen just the day before. Returning to Sarawak we cleaned-up on most of the realistic targets – Black Oriole, Hook-billed Bulbul, Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker and a last-gasp pair of roosting Dulit Frogmouth!

After arriving into Kota Kinabalu, we had up-to-date news that a Spectacled Flowerpecker, an undescribed species only seen by an extremely lucky few birders had spent much of the last week munching berries in a favoured tree in deepest Brunei. Sensing the excitement of a twitch, off we went. We reached Ulu Temburung Resort in the evening, using both car and boat. Finsch's Bulbul, Black Hornbill, Buff-rumped Woodpecker, Grey-rumped Treeswift, Whiskered Treeswift, Brown-backed Needletail greeted us during the journey and after arrival.

Eagerly awaiting our quest, despite us being present from dawn there was no sign of the flowerpecker, and nor would it be sighted again. Nevertheless, we enjoyed the Scarlet Minivet, Raffles's Malkoha, Lesser

Cuckooshrike, Moustached Hawk Cuckoo, Plain Sunbird, Black-and-yellow Broadbill, Velvet-fronted Nuthatch and Drongo Cuckoo at the canopy walkway before returning back to Sarawak, and heading up to our camp at Paya Maga from the mid-afternoon.

During the walk up we enjoyed Scaly-breasted Bulbul before being alerted to the presence of Hose's Broadbill, that flew back-and-forth across the track, perching briefly for us – it was a great sense of relief finding this jewel after our morning of disappointment. Post-dusk and pre-dawn Bornean Frogmouth led us a merry dance before sunrise signaled the start of our diurnal birding. Our number one target, Black Oriole was enjoyed, along with a range of other island and Sundiac endemics including Bornean Bulbul, Bornean Leafbird, Pygmy Heleia (Ibon), Bornean Spiderhunter, Red-billed Malkoha, Orange-breasted Trogon, Scarlet-rumped Trogon and two other targets – Dayak Jungle-flycatcher, a proposed endemic split from Hill Blue-flycatcher, and Temminck's Babbler. As this tour was not just centered around the birds, we also enjoyed a variety of pitcher plants and other endemic flowers that perked Joe's interest. Seven species of pitcher plants were viewed closely during the trip ~ *Nepenthes ampullaria*, *N. bicalcarata*, *N. fusca*, *N. gracillia*, *N. mirabilis*, *N. reinwardtiana* and *N. vegolii*, where two species are endemic to Borneo and one species is even endemic to Sarawak.

Nepenthes bicalcarata is endemic to Borneo and it's very special on the upper pitcher with two prominent thorns that give the plant its name. The thorns are actually enlarged nectar glands which produce large amount of nectar to lure various species of ants and insects, however it also plays host to a remarkable species of ant (*Camponotus schmitzi*) that makes its nests in the pitcher tendrils. The ants descend into the pitcher and swim in the fluid to retrieve large preys and consumed. *N. fusca* is also endemic to Borneo and occurs widely across the island. It rarely seen except for occasional dead pitcher drop on the forest floor as it grows almost exclusively as epiphyte high in the tree canopy. We were lucky to have few plants grow by the road side and allow us to have a closed up view. Though of most interest was the *N. vegolii*, a newly described species endemic to the mountains of Northern Sarawak and only can be found between 1000-140m, it grows as epiphyte on tall trees and only can be seen by using binoculars, again we were lucky to have a few plants growing by the road side.



Nepenthes bicalcarata



Nepenthes fusca



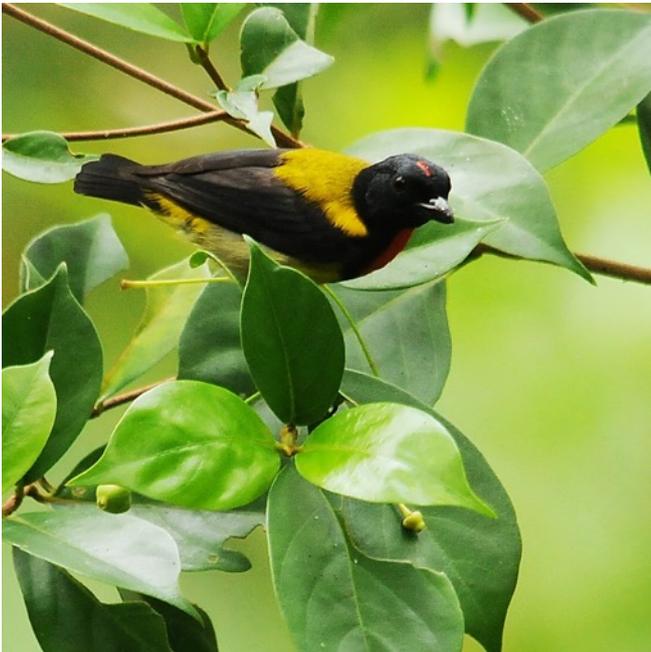
Nepenthes vegolii

Another night, and another no-show from the frogmouth but the next morning a female White-tailed Flycatcher was a surprise, while we saw another Dayak Jungle-flycatcher. Heading back down to the main road we continued up into the Kelabit Highlands. Unfortunately, the road, after the heavy La Niña rains was in a dreadful state, and this once two-hour journey is now a six-hour slog!

At night, Dulit Frogmouth, our single target here, called back without showing. Leading us to think it wasn't going to be our luck with frogmouths. After a pre-dawn failure there was only one thing for it – we would have to find them roosting, as one does! Incredibly, after a bit of searching and rummaging around the undergrowth, Yeo announced that he'd not only found the Dulit Frogmouth roosting, but actually a pair, sat side-by-side – incredible! As the road condition was so appalling, and the main target under our belt we decided to leave the highlands early, and head into the coastal lowlands.



Orange-breasted Trogon and White-tailed Flycatcher



Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker and Hook-billed Bulbul

A final morning birding in a remnant area of peatswamp forest we finally located both a splendid male Scarlet-breasted Flowerpecker and the much-wanted Hook-billed Bulbul, along with a range of other species including Red-naped and Diard's Trogons, Black-bellied and Red-billed Malkoha, Red-crowned Barbet, Rufous-backed Kingfisher and Long-billed Spiderhunter. After all this fun, it was time to celebrate our success over dinner!

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