

Mammals of Fraser's Hill

Fraser's Hill is a well-known location for studying birds and insects. Equally exciting, but lesser known, is the mammal life. Celine Low sheds some light on the subject.

Text by **Celine Low**

Fraser's Hill (in Malay, Bukit Fraser), which straddles the states of Pahang and Selangor in Peninsular Malaysia, is part of the forested Titiwangsa Mountain Range and rises to 1,310 m elevation. Fraser's Hill is covered and surrounded by sub-montane primary rainforest, and has cool temperatures of 17–25° C year round (Strange, 2004).

The World Wide Fund For Nature-Malaysia gives the number of mammals for Fraser's Hill as 52 species. From my records, at least 10 more species can be added to the list, but some are not substantiated. Work is currently under way to compile a complete checklist; for the time being this anecdotal visual presentation will have to do.

Among the commonly seen mammals of Fraser's Hill the White-thighed Langur (or Leaf Monkey) is one of the most conspicuous, although the Dusky Langur also occurs, see *Nature Watch* 19(2) for more information about the leaf monkeys. Southern Pig-tailed Macaque is a fairly shy monkey that is sometimes seen along the access roads; whilst the bolder Long-tailed Macaque has come up to the hill in recent years. The daily call of the Siamang rouses feelings primeval, but good views are difficult. The related White-handed Gibbon (*Hylobates lar*, not illustrated here) occurs lower down the hill near the Gap.

Other diurnal mammals include the Eurasian Wild Pig, the photograph on the poster was taken near the garbage dump, and of course the squirrels, with the Western Striped Squirrel (previously



Fraser's Hill is covered and surrounded by sub-montane primary rainforest, and has cool temperatures of 17–25° C year round. Photo Morten Strange.

Himalayan Squirrel, *Tamiops mccllellandii*) being abundant and the Pallas's Squirrel (previously Mountain Red-bellied Squirrel, *Callosciurus erythraeus*) also common. The Grey-bellied Squirrel and the Red-cheeked (Ground) Squirrel are less numerous. See box regarding the small *Sundasciurus* squirrels. As we know, most mammals in the tropics are nocturnal, and among those the Masked Palm Civet appears to be the most commonly seen at Fraser's.

Some animal stories

I have started visiting Fraser's Hill regularly since December 2006, when my companions and I discovered a charming colonial bungalow with plenty of character and a view of the kind that must have enraptured Louis James Fraser



Western Striped Squirrel is a very common mammal at Fraser's Hill. Here one is feeding on a cicada near the Jelai Highlands Resort, famous for its bird activity at dawn. Photo Morten Strange.



Red-cheeked Squirrel was formerly Red-cheeked Ground Squirrel. It is not common but is sometimes seen on or near the ground along the roads. Photo Tan Heok Hui

The two little squirrels of Fraser's Hill



Low's Squirrel. Photo Tan Heok Hui



Low's Squirrel has a distinct white belly seen well from this angle. Photo Nick Baker

Two small squirrels in the *Sundasciurus* genus occur at Fraser's Hill, so look closely if you spot one of those. Both the Slender Squirrel *S. tenuis* and Low's Squirrel *S. lowii* have been collected from Fraser's Hill and confirmed recently in photographs, but they are difficult to distinguish in the field.

The Slender is definitely more slender with a relatively longer tail and the belly is greyish, while Low's has an unmistakably white underside, clearly demarcated. The fur of Slender appears more rufous, while Low's is dark brown. Low's tends to move low in the under-storey or even on the ground, while Slender is often higher in the trees.

To make matters even more complicated, the Slender Squirrel at Fraser's Hill is of the subspecies *Sundasciurus tenuis tahan* which is restricted to high-

lands in Peninsular Malaysia. It has been found to be genetically distinct and is likely to be elevated to species level in the very near future, *S. tahan*. It is our opinion that *Sundasciurus tenuis* and *S. tahan* do not co-exist, and that only *S. tahan* can be found at Fraser's Hill, although other observers have reported both subspecies. This needs to be confirmed. For the time being, and for the purpose of the poster, we have included the Slender Squirrel here as *Sundasciurus tenuis*.



The Slender Squirrel at Fraser's Hill is of the subspecies *Sundasciurus tenuis tahan*. Photo Morten Strange

when he decided to build his home somewhere near the hill that was later named after him.

The caretakers who used to run the bungalow told us that animals regularly came to raid the peas they grow in the garden, and sure enough, one morning in September 2008, three White-thighed Langurs descended in our garden and gorged on the peas. After their leguminous breakfast, they sat on the garden bench and luxuriated in the delightful morning breeze, entranced by the zephyr softly fingering the fur framing their thoughtful faces. We jostled for prime viewing spots, trying to blend into the curtains while taking photographs, and our simian visitors even



White-thighed Langur gorging on peas. Photo Celine Low

left us a memento by the garden bench – remains of their previous meal, which we dutifully photographed, since none of us volunteered to tuck it into his/her memento drawer.

It was in one of the nights during this trip that we had another mammalian visitor, a winged one. We had put up a moth sheet and lights to attract moths to our balcony, so that we could photograph and document them. We attracted moths, and the moths attracted an insectivorous horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus* sp.), which flew around our balcony and caught moths on the wing. It was amazing to watch how the bat expertly maneuvered its way around the relatively confined space without hitting the walls or pillars and skillfully picked off the juicier moths with its echolocation.

Another one of my travel companions described a mammal he had seen behind one of the bungalows when he was taking photographs of butterflies, and I surmised it to be a Yellow-throated Marten when he mentioned it stood up on its hind legs to look at him. I have since, very diligently, sneaked around that very same bungalow every time I went to Fraser's Hill, but to no avail.

As if Lady Luck were taunting me, when my companions and I were assiduously applying our efforts to look for wildlife, traipsing about one afternoon in December 2008, and we had left one of our travel mates resting on a bench because he was not feeling well, she cheekily sent a pair of Yellow-throated

obligingly showed us the spot where she had seen the Tiger lying down one fine morning, while she was practicing taiji. It was at the boundary of the forest and her vegetable garden, and it had probably gone there to rest for the day. She immediately scooted off into the house when she saw the Tiger, locking all the doors. Her gardener's dog was tied up by the vegetable garden, tail tucked in between its legs, shivering with fright. It was cowering, trying to be as inconspicuous as possible, as quiet as a mouse. Fortunately, the Tiger did not have a palate for dogs and left it alone.

Fraser's Hill is 'peppered' with an exotic plant called *Piper aduncum*, which has invaded Peninsular Malaysia



Bats are common at Fraser's Hill but photographs are hard to come by and more studies of the species are needed. This is a Great Roundleaf Bat *Hipposideros armiger* photographed inside one of the bungalows by Nick Baker.



Yellow-throated Marten. Photo Zhang Yong

since 1957 or earlier. My companions and I have seen Sunda Slow Lorises in *Piper aduncum* numerous times, and I have also photographed a Slow Loris feeding on the inflorescence of the plant, leading us to nickname the plant the 'Slow Loris Plant'. We have also seen Common Palm Civets in the Piper and I have photographed a Small-toothed Palm Civet feeding on the inflorescence as well, and a Western Striped Squirrel



Binturong. Photo Celine Low

feeding on the infructescence of the plant. It seems it is not only humans who have a taste for exotic and non-native fruits and vegetables.

2009 must have been my lucky year, for having waited ten years to see a Leopard Cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) in the wild, I saw three of them in that same year. After I saw the first one, a friend joked that my curse had been broken, and true enough, I saw the next two within a short span of time, both of those were at Fraser's Hill.

I have also been very fortunate to see one of our modern day unicorns, the rare Binturong. It was the night before New Year's Eve in 2009, and my companions and I were walking along one of the roads, spot lighting, while slivers of mist caressed our faces like Ghosts of New Years Past. I was lagging slightly behind when I spotted eye-shine in a tree and signaled the rest to stop.

We started taking photographs and it looked like an unusual civet to me. We could only see its face as it was resting in the tree and its body was hidden. I must have been blinded by the Ghosts

of New Years Present as it did not occur to me that it was a Binturong. Later, when I caught up with a friend who was walking ahead and showed him my photograph, he identified it as a Binturong and we were so excited we went back to ogle at it like star-struck teenagers at a celebrated idol.

The very next night, which was a full moon night, we were walking along the same road again, hoping that the Ghosts of New Years Yet To Come would indulge us with a repeat performance. Of course, the Binturong had other ideas and had made itself scarce. I was rewarded though, with a sight so magical, my heart soared with the giant flying squirrel (*Petaurista* sp.), which floated from a tall tree to another, right above me. The squirrel covered a distance of at least 50 metres across the road, and I felt as though time stood still and watched with me, enthralled, at a screen playing in slow motion, showing the squirrel's fully extended body and patagium, etched against the voluminous silvery full moon in the sky.

I knew then, that I was home. 🌲

Tips for Mammal Watching

1. **Fruiting trees** are great stakeout points.
2. Nocturnal mammals can be detected by their **eye-shine**, which glows red or yellow or white when a torch light or head lamp is shone on them.
3. Be as **quiet** as possible, unless you want to warn animals of your impending approach.

Etiquette for Mammal Watching

1. As nocturnal mammals have extra sensitive eyesight as an adaptation to a dim light environment, **minimal use of strong light** should be employed.
2. Repeated **camera flashing** is also unseemly behaviour.
3. Do not cause the animals **undue stress**. The welfare of the animals should be paramount at all times, rather than the collecting of digital trophies, especially under the guise of promoting awareness and conservation.
4. **Do not go out alone** in case one sustains an injury or loses consciousness and is unable to get help.
5. **Keeping to the roads and trails** would be prudent as one can easily get lost in the forest.

REFERENCES

- Francis, C.M. (2008). *A Field Guide to the Mammals of South-East Asia*. New Holland, London.
- Strange, M. (2004). *Birds of Fraser's Hill: An Illustrated Guide and Checklist*. Nature's Niche, Singapore.



The author on the left with some friends at Fraser's Hill covering all the angles. Photo Vilma D'Rozario.

Celine Low is a keen naturalist and the secretary of the NSS Vertebrate Study Group. When she is not out looking for animals, she is a sales executive in the pharmaceutical industry.

Editor's note to the poster on pages 12-13: We compiled and edited a selection of photographs of mammals taken at Fraser's Hill, some by the author of the article, others by various contributors. The support we got from visitors to the hill station was very encouraging, and we thank all contributors for their efforts. All images in the poster are of authentic free-living mammals photographed on location at Fraser's Hill. Most were spotted right around the main network of roads such as the Telekom Loop, the Old Road, Jalan Richmond, Bishop's Trail and other favorite wildlife watching trails. While diurnal mammals are fairly comprehensively covered, some nocturnal groups such as bats, rats and cats are under-represented. The bats are there, but they are difficult to identify and photograph, likewise with most of the rodents. Among the cats, both Leopard Cat and Leopard (black form) have been sighted, and a Tiger was photographed along the New Road in July 2009. However, we were unable to obtain a copy of the photograph.

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Southern Pig-tailed Macaque
Macaca nemestrina Photo Nick Baker



White-thighed Langur
Presbytis siamensis Photo Adam Strange



Siamang *Symphalangus syndactylus*
Photo Morten Strange



Western Striped Squirrel
Tamiops mccllellandii Photo Morten Strange



Pallas's Squirrel
Callosciurus erythraeus Photo Morten Strange



Grey-bellied Squirrel
Callosciurus caniceps Photo Morten Strange



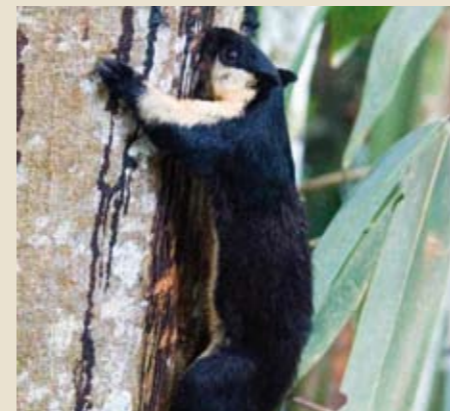
Long-tailed Macaque
Macaca fascicularis Photo Morten Strange



Dusky Langur
Trachypithecus obscurus Photo Morten Strange



Sunda Colugo
Galeopterus variegatus Photo Nick Baker



Black Giant Squirrel
Ratufa bicolor Photo Preston Murphy



Slender Squirrel
Sundasciurus tenuis Photo Morten Strange



Red-cheeked Squirrel
Dremomys rufigenis Photo Morten Strange



Sunda Slow Loris
Nycticebus coucang Photo Celine Low



Binturong *Arctictis binturong*
Photo Ong Peck Cheng



Masked Palm Civet
Paguma larvata Photo Celine Low



Indomalayan Pencil-tailed Tree-Mouse
Chiropodomys gliroides Photo Nick Baker



Short-tailed Gymnure
Hylomys suillus Photo David Bakewell



Common Treeshrew
Tupaia glis Photo Morten Strange



Small-toothed Palm Civet
Arctogalidia trivirgata Photo Celine Low



Red Giant Flying Squirrel
Petaurista petaurista Photo Celine Low



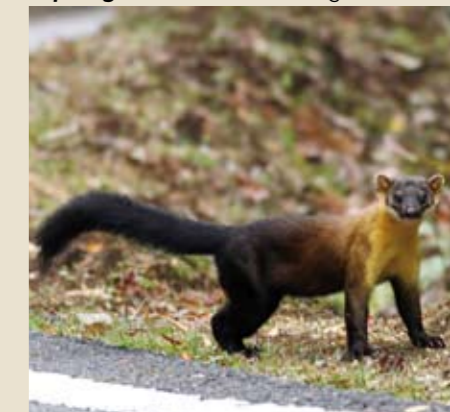
Lesser Giant Flying Squirrel
Petaurista elegans Photo Celine Low



Eurasian Wild Pig
Sus scrofa Photo Morten Strange



Sunda Pangolin
Manis javanica Photo Celine Low



Yellow-throated Marten
Martes flavigula Photo Zhang Yong